



Dear KSD Community Members,

I was reminded again this week, from multiple incidents, that we must continue to ensure every child can learn in an environment free from racism, sexism, bullying, and any other form of harassment or discrimination. This work is urgent and important. The job of a community is to prepare its students to become productive members of society who are capable of reaching success in numerous ways. Anything that gets in our way of achieving this desired outcome is simply unacceptable.

Every public school system in the U.S. is grappling with the lingering impacts of systemic racism. This includes KSD. But you already knew this. Several years ago, as a community, led by your Board of Education and then superintendent Dr. Bill Nicely, you openly acknowledged that this was important work and made a commitment to take on this responsibility, acknowledging that there would be messiness that would accompany these efforts.

Sometimes, when you are in the middle of such efforts, it's easy to lose sight of the progress you've made and become disheartened. I think it's important that you remember how far you have come.

You began this work several years ago with the formation of our Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Committee. Your students took the lead in forming "Kearney Inclusion 'N Diversity" (KIND) Clubs to foster productive conversations to address harassment and discrimination in our schools. You have acknowledged that progress in this work is slow, cumbersome, and full of one-step-forward and two-steps-back cycles of improvement. But you have continued the work because of its importance.

Then, in 2019, some racist incidents reminded our Bulldog Family that our work to eradicate discrimination and harassment must continue. Again under the leadership of your Board and Dr. Nicely, you instituted a number of important changes and initiatives:

- Changing policies and procedures to address racial bullying and harassment incidents
- Developing an agreement of support with the Kansas City chapter of the NAACP
- Participating in a program called School SPIRIT, which brought together a representative group of students who spent time discussing school issues that included race
- Facilitating a "Student-Only Conversation About Race and Equity" using a local facilitator, Jamie Grayson, founder of People of All Colors Succeed (POAC)
- Launching the "BULLDOGS Respect" campaign created by the DEI Committee

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- Coordinating our efforts with the city of Kearney and a network of local churches
- Participating in POAC's anti-bullying / leadership program

The work that you have begun is noteworthy, important and incomplete. I encourage you to continue this most important work. Collectively, you make KSD a place where racism and every other form of harassment, discrimination and hate are not tolerated.

This year, serving as your Interim Superintendent, has only reinforced my conviction that KSD is one of the best public school systems in the region, state and nation. Most of our students received a truly world-class education. But "most" isn't good enough. The work must have the mantra, "All means ALL."

I wish you the very best and look forward to celebrating your future collective success.

Sincerely,

Dr. Todd White

Superintendent of Schools