

September 15, 2017

Dear Littleton Public Schools Parents:

We are about one month into the 2017-2018 school year, and I want to convey the excitement I see in classrooms across the district. Since the very first day of school, it has been great fun to see our students arrive with smiles on their faces, eager to continue their journey of learning in LPS.

I also want to share with you an important focus for LPS this year. Our district achievement goal states: "One hundred percent of LPS students will graduate prepared for meaningful post-secondary opportunities." In LPS, we are committed to the ideal that ***all means all***. All students -- regardless of race, ethnicity, religion, disability, twice exceptionality; students who are gifted, immigrants, English language learners, LGBTQ, homeless, poor, affluent; and those who may have social, emotional, behavioral, or academic challenges -- matter. ***All students are welcome in our schools.***

I spent time over the summer thinking about how Littleton Public Schools might be impacted by the rhetoric of intolerance, discrimination and violence we have seen emerging across our nation and around the world. Our community is not disconnected from these events; what happens within society always finds its way to the schoolhouse door.

For example, we recently saw instances in our schools in which students used anti-Semitic symbols such as swastikas, racial epithets, and ridicule through stereotyping. In some cases, the students did not intend to be hurtful; they were simply unaware of the true meaning behind the symbols and language. They did not fully understand how painful these symbols and words can be. In other instances, the students had full understanding and chose to behave in this way.

These are societal issues and our schools reflect what happens in society. Therefore, we ask all LPS parents and community members to partner with us as we help our students to understand that this kind of behavior will not be tolerated in LPS. We can be better.

We have a number of social, emotional and behavioral programs and interventions in place that teach students appropriate ways to interact. Every day, our staff members reinforce these positive behaviors through instructional practices that align with Board of Education policies and state law. Each instance of inappropriate behavior is unique, taken seriously and handled with care. We address them individually, keeping in mind the age, maturity level, understanding of the issue and intent of the student. We utilize a range of interventions, including disciplinary consequences, restorative justice and educational activities to address these incidents. Parental involvement is an important part of this process.

We expect our students to learn and demonstrate suitable ways to discuss age-appropriate (and sometimes controversial) topics in the classroom as part of their studies. As educators, it is our duty to model respect and inclusiveness for all. Every day in our schools, we honor the expectation that differing views and opinions should be discussed, but always within the framework of respect and seeking to understand.

It is our moral responsibility as public school employees to stand against hateful thought and ideology. It is our responsibility to create a culture of acceptance in our schools and community, so every student and family knows immediately that they matter, we care and we are committed to providing learning environments that are physically, socially and emotionally safe places for all.

The results of last fall's districtwide climate and culture survey show that students, parents and employees overwhelmingly reported feeling safe and positive about the climate in their schools. In fact, LPS scored higher in the positive range than the national norms for every dimension except one (parent perception of safety in social media). We share our parents' concerns about social media, as it exacerbates every challenge our students face. We will continue to support parents as they teach their children appropriate social media behaviors, find ways to limit their children's social media exposure, and be aware of their children's social media activity.

We will be conducting the climate and culture survey again this year. The data tells us we are on the right track in many areas, but there are clear areas for improvement, as well. We look forward to the continued progress. This fall, as part of policy review, the LPS Board of Education will engage in conversations about these topics and will reinforce these beliefs.

The LPS community is a caring place that continually demonstrates its commitment to our children and to its schools. Thank you, students, parents, staff members and community members, for working together to provide a safe and caring environment for all students, and for committing to continuous improvement. This is important work and we simply cannot do it without you. Your partnership matters.

Warm Regards,

Brian Ewert
Superintendent
Littleton Public Schools