

February 17, 2017

Dear Shrewsbury Families, Staff & Community Members,

As we head into the February school vacation, I want to share a few thoughts with you regarding our school community.

First, here is an excerpt from a tweet posted by the SHS Class of 2017 in response to a Student Council request for reasons “#WhyWeLoveSHS.” You’ll see why it made my day:

This school has quickly become the place where we have found ourselves. We have found who we wanted to be, and maybe even who we were all along. It is the place where we were transformed from nervous, awkward teenagers into bold, intelligent leaders.... It is the place where we have met some of the best teachers we will ever have, the place that has prepared us for whatever the world is going to throw at us in the near future. It is the place that has shaped us...a place each and every one of us will carry in our hearts forever.

While I know that not all students may share these sentiments, it is gratifying that this perspective was articulated and supported by our SHS seniors, as we want our students to feel that their school experiences have made them better people who are prepared to make positive contributions to the world.

Second, here is an excerpt from SHS Principal, Todd Bazydlo, from his opening remarks to this morning’s Black History Month assembly at SHS:

There is too much hate in this world, too much fear of the unknown, and now more than ever hate and fear can be spread with speed, ease and anonymity. All of this can easily divide us. Therefore, you must, we must dig deep into information to determine the truth. Thinking critically, and opening your heart and mind to our collective differences, will help give us the perspective needed to be capable, caring active contributors and leaders to the world in which we live. Developing empathy and perspective is your responsibility as a student of Shrewsbury High School.

These remarks set the tone for the powerful student performances that followed, including spoken word, music, and dance, as well as student-created videos, all on the theme of understanding others’ perspectives while working together to build a strong community. The student artwork and writing submitted for this event were also superb. Not only were the students who were part of the program impressive, but the hundreds of students in the audience demonstrated great respect, support, and appreciation for their peers. It made me very proud.

Finally, I had the opportunity to visit Sherwood Middle School this afternoon to view a sixth grade student exhibition, where students presented projects on “rules to live by.” After completing various readings and then study of the “rules” that a leader of their choice lived by, these students then created their own. Many focused on hard work and perseverance in pursuit of one’s goals, and I was struck by how many also cited the importance of acting with kindness, respect, and courtesy. This project was another excellent example of how our schools are not only teaching our students academic skills, but also providing a means for them to develop these universally important values.

At this point in time in our society, our students need this kind of education more than ever. Unfortunately, they are growing up in a world where too many, especially adults who should know better, don’t follow the rules of common decency and respect, and instead use the availability of social media as a means to post insults and/or untruths that few would ever utter to someone in

person. Almost worse is when others then validate this attention seeking with judgmental comments, without having any knowledge of the real story. Maligning others, with no sense of fairness or respect, has become all too common. My disgust with this behavior, however, is tempered by the recognition that people who act this way are a minority, and countered by the hope I gain from students and educators like the ones I had the pleasure of witnessing today. As one sixth grade student, Gabriela Cardoso, wrote for her project:

I want to remind myself that the way I treat others is a reflection of who I am. The way I act around my family and friends shapes my character, and my attitude and actions ultimately form my reputation. Therefore, I try to be kind to each and every person I meet, so I can positively impact their day.

I think you'll agree that that's wise advice from a sixth grader.

Thank you to all of the parents and educators who are helping to instill these values in our children so that they develop a strong character. Please accept my best wishes for an enjoyable and safe vacation week.

Respectfully,

Joe Sawyer
Superintendent of Schools
