

Dear Parents,

This fall our children experienced a national election like no other with a constant barrage of television commercials that challenged our sense of decency and view of America. Regardless of our party affiliation we were left wondering how our children would react to this year's political process. This week after the election across the country and here in Norwood we have witnessed various signs of hatred and bigotry in the form of swastikas (Train Station) and insults to minority groups. Some of our students have experimented with these behaviors and the adults in our schools have reacted quickly to stop any harassment. Victims have been counseled, perpetrators disciplined and redirected and bystanders taught how to intervene. These instances are small in number but not something we want to continue.

I have spent this week talking with principals, staff members and students to measure their emotional health and resilience. The good news is that we have children who care about each other, adults who are attuned to your children's needs, and school routines and activities that kids love participating in every day. We held a special session at the High School Thursday afternoon led by Dean Colleen Cormier to discuss how students were feeling after the elections, collectively decide on the core values that can unite the school community and what action steps they should take as members of the Student Council, Global Citizens Club or concerned high school students. During the 45 minute discussion, students mentioned wanting to feel safe, be able to voice their opinions without tearing down someone else's ideas, not letting social media discussions get derailed into name calling, threats or crossing the line and having the sense to not make jokes at another expense. The core values of this group were Respect, Acceptance, Support, Empathy, Love, Walking Away, Not fighting fire with fire and Be the bigger person – BE A LEADER. After a role play of how to handle a name calling situation, the group is thinking about how to start a "Campaign of Kindness" and "What can we do to make our school better". This voluntary meeting of over 60 students was so encouraging to witness. We have some wonderful students with powerful ideas and intentions. On Tuesday, November 29th High School students will spend the day in a special school culture building activity called Challenge Day (www.challengeday.org). It will be a day of breaking down barriers between various groups to gain a better understanding of one another and build a school culture of acceptance.

Our Middle School has frequent sessions during the daily Mustang block experiencing evidence-based discussions and learning tolerance of differing opinions. Some of the ideas for these activities come from the Join the Debates curriculum found at this website <http://www.jointhedeates.org/> which features Norwood High School students demonstrating debating and listening skills. This Tuesday, the Coakley Teen Speak Out group will experience another training session around mentoring fellow students in tolerance and friendship activities that foster a positive school culture. The Middle School teaching staff works daily to model tolerance and find ways to foster healthy class discussions and is complimented by the Different But Equal Club that meets after school. Additionally, our elementary schools follow an Open Circle model that examines friendship, sharing, teamwork and appreciation of one another's differences. Each school highlights a variety of activities that promote the type of values our High School students mentioned at their meeting.

Please know that your child's emotional well being and safety is our first priority and that we will not allow incidents of intimidation and harassment based on race, ethnicity, gender, religion, or sexual identity to take place in our schools. If this does occur please speak with your child's teacher or principal, or if need be use our Bullying Incident form at <http://www.norwood.k12.ma.us/about/bullying-information.cfm> .

Positive acts of kindness and the values of respect and honesty are some of what we teach and model for our students every day. We are here to work with you not only during parent conferences but whenever the need arises so please contact your child's teacher or principal as we help our children to learn and grow.

Sincerely,

Jim Hayden

Superintendent of Schools