

Dear colleagues,

Normally at this time of year I like to write to our staff to welcome you to our school community. I enjoyed meeting many of you at the orientations over the last several weeks and I am looking forward to connecting with our returning staff as the school year moves forward.

Yet today I write on a more somber note. Our country continues to reflect on the horrific events in Charlottesville. I am saddened by the loss of life, the unapologetic display of bigotry, and the struggle that awaits our nation as we try to heal. We are heading back to school during one of the most tumultuous times our country has seen in recent history.

I recognize that many students, families and staff feel anxious, and I want to reiterate that school is a safe place for you. Our staff are highly skilled at supporting students when they are experiencing stress. Students can only reach their full potential when they feel safe in our buildings so this is a top priority for us.

Staff have a support system in each other, and we can be tremendously helpful simply by lending an ear and being a good friend. Please be available to talk to each other about the events that happened, including the bigotry, racism and oppression that the nation witnessed, even if it might be uncomfortable. Staff may also contact their medical provider or the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) if they need additional support.

In some cases, educators may use current events like these to teach lessons on peaceful conflict resolution, the role of protest in society or creating change in the face of tough societal events. During these lessons, please listen to students and ask open-ended questions so you can learn from and hear their perspectives, always with the developmental age of students in mind. When we are curious about one another we will increase our own knowledge and ability to bridge divides. This practice will benefit both students and adults.

While we encourage thoughtful discussion, we absolutely cannot and will not tolerate any dialogue that advances hateful ideologies or any actions that contribute to the oppression or marginalization of anyone in the diverse school community that we know and love. Please **see attached for resources to help you manage these discussions in your classroom** should they come up.

We are unwavering in our commitment to all people. Northeast Metro 916 is a place of hope and bright futures for students and their families. We are committed to ensuring they have access to what they need in order to learn, grow and thrive, a commitment that we extend to each other as colleagues as well. Equity is a core component of our work and it is necessary to maximize the potential of each individual student, staff and family. I want everyone to know that you are valuable members of our community, not in spite of your backgrounds, but because of them.

I am so happy that you are part of our community at our school district. I encourage your feedback and involvement about how we can do more, help in different ways, and improve on our equity efforts. Please reach out to me or any member of our leadership team if you have feedback to share.

Sincerely,

Connie