June 7, 2020

Dear Parents and Staff,

As a nation, we have once again witnessed the horrors of hatred and racism. The Board of Education and Administration have recently heard from members of the community and graduates about what the District is doing to oppose and combat racism. We would like to share with the school community and teachers the many things in recent years the School District has done to achieve our goal of equity and inclusivity for all of our students.

The Rockville Centre Schools are well positioned to work on defeating racism in our society. Although there is more to be done work is well underway in many areas. As a Schools of Opportunity Award winner, the high school has been recognized nationally for its programs and initiatives that eliminate the opportunity gap for students who have been underrepresented historically in advanced coursework and programs. This was also one of the reasons we were recognized as a Blue Ribbon School in 2018. Three years ago, we began working with the Anti-Defamation League training our teachers, administrators, staff and students at both our middle and high schools. We are proud to say that both schools are currently official “No Place For Hate” certified schools. Our students at South Side High School play an important role in Project Lead, meeting and working through difficult social justice conversations with their peers in the Uniondale and Jericho school districts. We also have community outreach task forces, which have helped us extend our reach further into the school community working with the MLK Center, Hispanic Brotherhood and the Equal Opportunity Center. This year we continued our work with the high school equity team- a collaboration between student leaders, administration and teaching staff, to discuss and address racism, equity and inclusivity.

As a founding member of LICEE, the Long Island Council for Excellence and Equity, our District has helped lead the way in equity work across New York State. Last year we began working hand in hand with the Anti-Racism Project in Rockville Centre. Staff members have been trained on recognizing and responding to bias and microaggressions.

We have begun an examination of all of our curriculum. Every curriculum piece written in the past two years has been viewed through a cultural competency lens. We look at every book we read, at every author, at every grade level. Our high school ELA curriculum was rewritten last summer to ensure the inclusion of more diverse voices and authors such as “The Thing Around Your Neck” by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and “Persepolis” by Marjane Satrapi.

At the elementary level, we are looking at every book we read and/or assign to our students for diversity of authors and content, ensuring inclusivity of all races, creeds, religious backgrounds, cultures, gender and sexuality for every classroom library purchase. Though these may not seem simple conversations to have with young students, we are fully committed to communicating with and educating them on diversity.
We are currently looking closely at our hiring practices as well. For each and every hire we look to ensure we are interviewing diverse candidates. We are re-examining ways to ensure we are attracting a diverse talent pool and ways in which we can better our reach. Our Assistant Superintendents have personally reached out to local universities including Queens College, St. John’s University and SUNY Old Westbury to try to find interest in our vacancies from diverse candidates. This is an area we simply must get better results.

During our Superintendent search, we surveyed our community and found that overwhelmingly we all agree that diversity is a priority for our district. Mr. June Chang, who will assume the superintendency on July 1, is an accomplished speaker on topics that include multiculturalism, acceptance and diversity. We have a strong foundation that Dr. Johnson has laid in fighting for equity for all students, and we are confident that Mr. Chang and our team will continue to build upon it for our future.

Lastly, we work to hold any and all students and staff accountable for their actions and will not tolerate racism in any form. This is clearly spelled out in our Code of Conduct. Unfortunately, we have had infractions resulting in suspensions and other disciplinary actions. Staff members have begun training on Restorative Practices to help build healthy communities, decrease anti-social behavior, and repair and restore relationships. Our goal is to get to the root of issues and work to resolve them.

All of this work is underway as we speak and is a vital part of what we do. It is intrinsic to our culture as a school district. Even with recognizing all of this work, we assure you we will continue to expand our efforts in this area. This nation has placed the issue of race on the back burner for far too long. We demand better of ourselves and look forward to continuing this conversation. As declared in our RVC Schools Mission Statement, our schools are a place where “diversity is respected and all students are enabled to realize their full potential.” We will continue this work together to better ourselves and our community.

Sincerely,

William H. Johnson & the Board of Education