



June 2, 2020

Dear West Chester Area School District Community,

This has been an extremely difficult school year, including the death this week of beloved middle school principal Dr. Charles Cognato. Now, as our country finds itself in violent turmoil and civil unrest after recent incidents of racism, and many in our school community have expressed concern, I feel compelled to once again reach out. As educators, we consider it our responsibility to ensure that *all* students and staff members feel safe, valued, and accepted in our school community. No one should feel afraid, threatened, or somehow inferior because of their skin color, religious beliefs, sexual orientation, or any other reason.

As much as I would like to believe our school district is a place of great tolerance, I know we still have work to do. Public schools are largely a reflection of our society. Today in the West Chester Area School District, parents of children of color speak about teaching their sons not to run in public, or not to put up the hood on their sweatshirts, for fear that they will be mistaken for a criminal. They live with this fear because they've seen this scenario play out. It's simply a chance they cannot take. Any parent of a child of color – and any student of color – will tell you that racism, in many forms, still exists in our community.

I believe it's our responsibility to work to end not only racism, but discrimination, prejudice, and intolerance. I have heard many people ask what they can do, and what we, as a school district, can do, to this end. I certainly don't pretend to have all of the solutions, but it's at times like this I value most the work of our district Equity Team comprised of staff members who work to promote tolerance in numerous ways across our district. This week they are reaching out to our staff members and to our high school students to offer discussion groups, resources, and support. We can listen to each other, respectfully consider each other's viewpoints, and begin to create solutions – even small ones – that may be right for all of our community.

Parents who want to discuss race with their children and would like some assistance can find a plethora of resources online, including one just launched by the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture. <https://nmaahc.si.edu/learn/talking-about-race>

Many have rightfully condemned the riots and violence that have occurred over the last week. Civil Rights leader Bayard Rustin, for whom one of our high schools is named, promoted a peaceful call to action. I believe his words ring true today:

“If we desire a society of peace, then we cannot achieve such a society through violence. If we desire a society without discrimination, then we must not discriminate against anyone in the process of building this society. If we desire a society that is democratic, then democracy must become a means as well as an end.”

It should go without saying that hate, disrespect, and intimidation have no place in our schools. We will continue to work to ensure our policies and procedures support this, and as a staff, we will continue to seek to understand the experience of **all** of our students and staff. We will continue to discuss ways that we can promote equality and inclusivity. And, we will warmly welcome all students to a place where differences are cherished.

Sincerely,

Dr. Jim Scanlon, Superintendent