

Maine School Administrative District No. 75

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***We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal,
that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights,
that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.***

– Declaration of Independence, 1776

February 17, 2017

Dear Parents:

Those words carry a great deal of weight! What they meant to those gathered in Philadelphia has changed and evolved over the decades since. But those words, at their core, are the foundation of our country.

We live in trying times in so many ways. Despite the partisanship we may observe in politics, concern for principles such as honesty, integrity, respect, freedom and liberty are universal. These are, in my estimation, issues that concern all of us, regardless of political affiliation. Similarly, it will take all of us to overcome issues of prejudice and discrimination!

Recent events, including the distribution of racist brochures in our community, are both disturbing and offensive. There is tension and anxiety from which our students and schools are not immune. The Nation is immersed in debate around the ideals and values we cherish most. We wonder what challenge each day will bring. Because of this, providing a safe, respectful learning environment for **every** student is paramount.

There is absolutely no place in our school system for racism, bigotry or disrespect. Our race, religious beliefs, sexual orientation and ethnicity are so dear to us that jokes, derogatory comments, even teasing about them, will be remembered for life. Simply put, those types of comments are off limits. Friends or not, comments about such are a form of harassment. Our students need to understand and adhere to this.

As adults, we must demonstrate respect for the diversity of beliefs and differences in our interactions with one another. The families of M.S.A.D. No. 75 and citizens of our four towns come from different backgrounds, with varied experiences, beliefs and values. It is our responsibility as teachers, parents and community members to ensure that conversations and interactions are respectful. It is imperative that students hear from all of us the expectation for appropriate behavior. We must reassure them that issues of harassment, discrimination or hostility will be taken seriously. The eyes of our students are upon us, our words and actions critically important. To this end, I seek your help.

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Please take time to talk with your child about your expectations for their behavior toward others. Make it clear that you support the right of every child, no matter who they are, to have a safe and respectful learning environment. This extends to all aspects of school: on the bus, in the classroom, throughout the hallways, or in the athletic arena!

Talk about how prejudice, discrimination and harassment have impacted your own life. Encourage them to “do the right thing” and confront those issues if they see them. Insist that your child report any issues of bullying or harassment they may encounter. Be prepared for them to be fearful or hopeless about doing so. They believe nothing will be done, nothing will change...it will only get worse. But the truth is by remaining silent or idly standing by, these very acts will continue! Help them understand that the motive of reporting is to help another, whereas “tattling” is intended to get someone in trouble. Our students struggle with these concepts, torn between peer pressure and conscience. Help us to develop a better sense of compassion and empathy for others, knowing that transgressions require amends and learning.

You may also want to consider participating in some community event designed to raise awareness or extend charity to others. Volunteering to serve those less fortunate might speak volumes!

In every school, administrators have been asked to provide age-appropriate instructional activities that address issues of respect throughout the school. When appropriate, involving student “voice” in designing such things as assemblies, student- led groups, speakers, or other ideas are encouraged. Teachers and other staff have been asked to monitor their own actions and comments, and to address issues that are reported or observed. Additional training for staff around these important issues will be a part of our professional development schedule.

By working together – home, school and community – we can make a difference. Let us not argue over political beliefs, but join hands together in addressing such issues and teaching the children of our community. Alone we will fail...together we can accomplish great things!

Respectfully,



Bradley V. Smith
Superintendent of Schools

/bb/ParentLtrRespect2017