

RSU 54/MSAD 54

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Dear MSAD 54 Families:

One of my roles as Assistant Superintendent is that I serve as the district's Affirmative Action officer. It is in this role that I became aware of threats directed at groups of students in our schools and it is with this in mind that I write this letter.

It is a fact that MSAD 54 is a strong school district with caring teachers and administrators who work very hard to help students gain the skills and knowledge necessary to be successful in their futures. It is a fact that school staff and community members alike all believe that our students should feel safe, welcome, and respected in school. Unfortunately it is also a fact that not all our students do in fact feel safe; far too many of our students go to school each day not feeling welcome for who they are. This is particularly important when a student faces bias based harassment. This last fact is what I'd like to address in this letter as it is important that a consistent message go out about what we in MSAD 54 believe is right and just for all our students.

What is *Bias-Based Harassment*?

It is behavior that specifically targets (directly or indirectly) individuals based on their (actual or perceived) race and skin color, national origin and ancestry, religion, disabilities, gender and sexual orientation. MSAD 54 policies, based on State and Federal laws, specifically prohibit bias based harassment. Policy ACAA-R outlines the process for students/others to report incidents of discrimination or harassment to the building administrator. Anyone may also reach out to me as the MSAD 54 Affirmative Action officer or to our Superintendent, Brent Colbry.

We can all agree that no student should ever feel unsafe in school. This is a foundational principle of school and something educators take very seriously. It is even more important that no student go to school feeling unsafe because of who they are as a result of bias-based behaviors and harassment. This just isn't okay and is something we intend to work on moving forward.

What can WE do to ensure our students all feel safe and welcome in school? It has been said that "It takes a village to raise a child", and it is in that spirit that we have chosen to send this letter home to parents K-12. What can WE do? We can report incidents of behavior to staff

whenever they come up. We can listen; to individuals of different races, genders, cultures, sexual orientation... and to the experiences of our students, our staff, and our community. We must talk about our shared values and about our school community expectations. And we can talk about discipline and how we will address bad behaviors with both education, and consequences (including referral to law enforcement where appropriate). It is important that any and all instances of harassment or bias-based behaviors be reported to staff.

As a school district, we intend to work with staff to support them in working with our students. We will provide opportunities for staff to talk, provide training to support staff in addressing biased-based behaviors, and will work to further improve school culture. As part of this work, we will engage our students, leverage our Civil Rights Teams, and develop a plan that includes opportunities for whole-school activities as well as ongoing regular conversations with students to help foster a positive and inclusive culture in our schools.

In MSAD 54, we take the welfare of our students and the safety and inclusivity of our school communities very seriously. We hope that this letter serves to inform you of our desire to address issues that exist around school culture and invite you to reach out to help. MSAD 54 truly is an amazing community. Together, we will work to ensure that all our kids come to school feeling safe, welcomed, and respected in our schools.

Sincerely,



Jonathan D. Moody
Assistant Superintendent of Schools
RSU 54 / MSAD54