

## HOPE 2.0

May 6, 2018

### Challenging the Status Quo

*Any business today that embraces the status quo as an operating principle is going to be on a death march.* -Howard Schultz

Fights gone viral, rampant disrespect within our halls and classrooms, growing mental health needs among our students, and diminishing support for and trust in public school as a system that can truly address the needs of an increasingly impoverished society. So what do we address first? We cannot change the impact of societal shifts on our student population and we cannot dictate family values in the homes of our community. So then what *do* we do? How can we win an increasingly uphill battle? At what point do we yield ourselves to the fact that we simply *cannot* fix all that is wrong in society and just do the best with the hand that we are dealt? My answer is, “never”.

While we cannot address the ills of society, we have an obligation to affect the impact of those ills in the lives of our students. Of course, this is *much* easier said than done. Consider the fact that our district appeared on the news this past week for fights in the high school that had gone viral. It was glaringly evident that every stride forward can be forgotten in the aftermath of one negative occurrence. So, we may have lost last week’s battle, but we remain committed to winning the war. In fact, I will be meeting with every parent of every student who was involved in last week’s fights at the high school. Why? Because our district has seen a gradual but stark decline in culture, trust, morale, and expectations around student behavior. If we allow it to continue, we will erode the very foundation of who we are as an institution of learning. We must change the conversation and raise the bar. The opening quote says it all.

We have been planning our strategy to address social and emotional learning (SEL) since January and are nearing the deployment phase. I have tried to chronicle our journey to keep everyone in the loop and hope that it has been helpful. We have finished our parent focus groups and have finalized the behavior norms for students and adults (parents, students, support staff, teachers, and administrators). We are currently planning professional development for June 8<sup>th</sup> and June 11<sup>th</sup> when we will share our school-wide norms, build awareness about the impact of trauma in our schools, and discuss our processes for addressing SEL (K-12) beginning in the fall of 2018.

I have invited some of our teachers to assist with planning the opening week of school in August, updating our PBIS lesson plans, and revising our Student Code of Conduct over the summer. As you can imagine there is still much work to be done, but we anticipate a more productive and supportive school year as we address SEL with a laser focus. I want to thank every teacher, parent, administrator and student who has added value to the process thus far. Our shared concerns will require shared solutions if we are to make a lasting difference for our students. I cannot stress the importance of collaboration in this effort. District office cannot do it alone.

For some, your confidence has waned to the point where you cannot continue to fight the fight and I both understand and honor your decision to move on. I also thank you for your service. I wish you the very best and hope that the next phase of your professional career will bring purpose and fulfillment.

For those who have decided to stay the course I thank you, hope that you will give the process a chance, and encourage you to engage in the dialogue to make us a better and stronger district. If we have learned nothing else from last week, we have learned that we are in this together, for better or worse. When one building makes the headlines, we *all* make the headlines. Nevertheless, let's stay focused on the positive things that we know are happening in our district through the work of our committed teachers, staff and administrators. Let's challenge the status quo and prove the naysayers wrong!

Tamara Willis, Ph.D.,  
Superintendent

#### **Piece of the Puzzle**



Kudos to Mr. Richard Andries and the students in the Fashion Design program in our School of the Arts at the high school. Last week they were granted the opportunity to visit the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. to participate in a master class with a featured fashion designer from Cuba. We are Hanna Proud!