

Kevin C. McGowan, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools

August 10, 2018

Dear Members of the Brighton Community,

I am writing to each District household to address a very important and timely matter. Recently, the community has been engaged in an essential conversation relating to diversity and equity. It has been said that our school environment is supportive of practices described as systemically racist. A variety of examples have been cited and information presented in various forums to support or further these claims. In no way, shape, or form is this communication an attempt to invalidate or diminish those claims. In fact, I am writing in the hopes that you will all be willing to engage in a discussion that impacts all of us, particularly the underrepresented in our community, and has the potential to yield meaningful, sustained change in who we are as a community.

This issue is of the utmost importance. No person in a community should ever experience discrimination or a lack of equity. No person should feel less than another, marginalized in any way or treated in a manner that is not equitable. We should be aware of our own implicit bias and be willing to take immediate steps to correct our actions that create inequity. We should act quickly and thoughtfully to make sure that our systems are not discriminatory or in any way protecting privilege. I hope that no member of our community is willing to be silent when behaviors or actions hurt another person, whether by design or through a lack of awareness of one's own bias.

This is an important community conversation.

We should lead the way in making change and fostering this important dialogue for our community and our nation.

It is our belief and commitment to work in the diversity and equity area that drove our District to begin addressing these issues several years ago. We worked through our planning process and took specific steps to address our overall graduation rate while focusing on strategies that would support at-risk students from all subgroups. It was clear that there was a large gap between the achievement of all students and the achievement of students from traditionally underrepresented groups. **I am proud to say that the gap has been**

closing and nearly all students, from all groups, are achieving at a high level. This was accomplished by the hard work of students, their families, and our staff. Systems were implemented to address areas in which students were struggling, individualized interventions were developed to support each child, and their progress was monitored. These systems were applied to all students, from all groups, and have resulted in greater success throughout the District without changing our high expectations for each child. **Our staff played a key role in this work and should be commended for their commitment to each child.**

We've been closing gaps and making progress!

This work has continued in numerous ways over the past few years. We have supported existing and emerging student groups interested in promoting awareness and activities related to diversity and equity. We have promoted and supported specific student activities and events related to this work. Most

importantly, we have provided our K-12 instructional staff with training on implicit bias and facilitated a variety of building-based discussions and activities related to this work.

This work was prioritized by the District formally in last year's strategic plan.

Last year's Blueprint plan, our guiding document for short and long-range planning, named diversity and equity as a new priority area and called for the development of a District Diversity and Equity Committee. The Committee established a statement on diversity and equity, determined areas to review for potential inequity, and received feedback from the Curriculum Council's work on culturally responsive curriculum and improving access to rigorous coursework.

District Statement on Diversity and Equity:

The Brighton CSD will continue to respect, value, and validate all of the ways we are different in our community. We recognize the many forms of diversity among us including race, gender, sexuality, ability, socioeconomic status, and cultural identity in all forms overt and hidden. We believe that these differences are what make us each unique, special and important as human beings and prepare each individual to be a good citizen in a multicultural world.

All students and staff should be an equal member of a school environment that honors and respects the individuality of one another. Students should be provided with a culturally responsive curriculum by a staff that continues its long history of embracing diversity in all forms. We will be intentionally inclusive in our practices, policies, and environment.

Our Blueprint plan continues to prioritize this area for work in the District. During this coming year we will:

1. *Study and make recommendations for improvement in our recruitment and hiring practices in order to diversify our staff.*
2. *Study and make recommendations for improving family engagement and the student experience for underrepresented populations.*
3. *Study and make recommendations to promote equity in our special education program.*
4. *Work with Renee Baker, Assistant Vice President, RIT Office of Faculty Recruitment, and Rev. Dr. Marlowe Washington, Pastor of Seneca United Methodist Church, and former Brighton parent, as outside experts to work with our Diversity and Equity Committee.*
5. *Work with Rev. Washington as a liaison for families and a resource for all school community members as we explore our own practices, procedures, and systems.*
6. *Study and make recommendations for improvement in discipline practices.*

Here's where you come in...

We need your help and attention. Please engage in this dialogue and be a part of improving our systems, practices, and relationships. We can and will improve our work and ultimately our community by making sure that we fulfill the concept in our statement above, "all students and staff should be an equal member of a school environment that honors and respects the individuality of each other." Please stay tuned and look for opportunities to volunteer on a committee or engage in discussions that will take place throughout the year regarding this important work.

Sincerely,



Kevin McGowan, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools