



October 20, 2016

Dear Lawrence Public Schools Staff and Community,

The Lawrence Board of Education's Excellence, Equity and Engagement goals serve to *raise the achievement of all students, while closing achievement gaps*. To accomplish these goals, significant systemic change is needed, including reflection on personal beliefs to align them with district expectations and improve educational practices. Approximately ten years ago, Lawrence Public Schools began an intensive focus on eliminating racial achievement disparities. The school board contracted with the Pacific Educational Group (PEG) to provide training and technical assistance through its Framework for Systemic Equity/Anti-Racism Transformation.

Foundational to this framework is the two-day Beyond Diversity seminar. The board intends for all USD 497 employees to participate in Beyond Diversity, learn how to use the Courageous Conversations about Race protocol (the compass, four agreements and six conditions) and deepen their understanding of institutionalized racism and its impact on student learning. Since 2009, more than 1,500 teachers, support staff, administrators, board members, parents and community partners have participated in Beyond Diversity.

The district has developed, and the board approved, an Educational Equity and Excellence Plan and yearly equity goals. We created a District Equity Leadership Team, school Equity Teams and a Staff of Color support group. We hired an equity facilitator, who along with a teacher, received training in order to lead Beyond Diversity workshops. All secondary schools, and some elementary schools, created student equity leadership groups. The district uses an equity lens to recruit, hire, develop and evaluate personnel and to improve our curriculum, instruction and assessment practices.

Equity goals for the 2016-17 school year include continued Beyond Diversity training, teacher professional development around culturally relevant instruction, consideration of enhancements to discrimination and harassment policies and engagement of parents and communities of color in authentic and purposeful ways to raise student achievement. We will implement student supports recommended by an LGBTQ+ Task Force, form an advisory team to solicit input from student groups, continue LGBTQ+ panel discussions and provide professional development for staff around these issues. The district also will continue to address equity in technology access, facilities and resource allocation.

Finally, I want to express my own personal commitment to this work. Equity is a fundamental value of mine. I believe all children, regardless of race, color, religion, sex, age, national origin, disability, background, socio-economic status, sexual orientation or gender identity, deserve a high quality education. The district's equity journey is a personal one, but it is not optional. It is my expectation, and the intent of the board, that each employee commits to develop knowledge and skills and works to identify and eliminate institutional racism.

Lawrence Public Schools must continue to improve by engaging our school community in providing a student-centered system of supports, so that all students achieve, succeed and graduate future ready. With commitment, professional development and support, we will work together to achieve these goals and live our mission: *Lawrence USD 497 is a learning community committed to ensuring educational equity and excellence so that students of all races and backgrounds achieve at high levels and graduate prepared for success in college, careers and life in a diverse and rapidly changing world.*

Sincerely,

Kyle Hayden  
Superintendent