



October 24, 2016

Dear USD 497 Staff and Community,

The Lawrence Board of Education shares our community's concerns regarding institutional racism and other social injustices, and stands in solidarity with Black Lives Matter, Standing Rock, LGBTQ and women's rights efforts, and other attempts to bring these important issues to the forefront of public discussion. We know that public schools, as major institutions within our society, have historically helped perpetuate the institutionalized racism and other social injustices that exist within our society, something that still continues to this day. Recognizing this, the Board and district began a journey almost ten years ago to address this within Lawrence Public Schools, and we invite the community to review the history of that journey on the district's website.


The district has made progress, due in large part to the equity champions we have at the building and district levels. But the Board acknowledges more work is needed to dismantle the institutional aspects of racism and other inequities (obvious and subtle) that still exist within our own district and community. We recognize that there are students, family members, and staff who still do not feel safe to be who they are, or to speak out when they or others have experienced injustices, and that is not acceptable.

And so the Board continues to view equity as a fundamental priority. Toward that end, we annually establish excellence, equity, and engagement goals to reduce social injustices within the district and eliminate racial and other achievement disparities. We believe that everyone deserves a safe space to learn and work within, and that all students have the ability to learn and achieve at high levels when given a level playing field. The Board also recognizes that the diversity among our student body, school families, and staff strengthens our community and adds richness to the educational experience. Therefore, we've committed to enacting systemic change to create safe and accepting environments, to raise the achievement of all students, and to close achievement gaps.

The Board monitors the district's progress on its goals through regular staff reports during twice monthly meetings. These public meetings are held on the second and fourth Mondays of the month at the school district office, 110 McDonald Drive. We invite the community to review board agendas, attend public meetings, watch board meeting broadcasts or video archives, read the district's quarterly newsletters in the *Lawrence-Journal World*, and visit the district website for more information about our equity work. Board members also invite staff and patrons to contact us individually with any questions, concerns, or feedback about how Lawrence Public Schools seek to prepare all students for college, careers, and civic engagement. The simple fact of the matter is the Board's current makeup necessitates we receive feedback and insights from those students, families, and community members who've lived the various social injustices that still plague our community.

We want to reiterate that our goal is to provide Lawrence with equitable learning environments where all students, school families, and staff feel safe and accepted. We have this goal not just to improve the educational experience and lives of marginalized students, staff, and student families, but to generate greater overall awareness and empathy regarding inequity as our students take their place in the larger world. Our schools are on the front line for creating the change needed to stop the perpetuation of institutionalized racism and other social injustices. We ask that staff and the community stand with us, stay engaged, and help steady us when we occasionally stumble along the path towards equity.

Sincerely,



Marcel Harmon, President
Lawrence Board of Education

Shannon Kimball, Vice President
Kristie Adair
Jessica Beeson
Jill Fincher
Rick Ingram
Vanessa Sanburn