



3 July 2020

Dear Avon Public School Families and Community,

As the events of this Spring and Summer lead us towards not just a “new normal,” but we hope, a “better” one, the entire APS team is reflecting on and continuing our work on how we can best support all our students. This is the heart of the work outlined in our school mission statement and strategic plan, *Blueprint for Excellence*, especially in the first two focus areas, which center on student learning and personal growth and relationships. As a school district, we have a responsibility to create a culture of inclusive practices and to grow learners to be socially conscious adults who value diversity and strive for equity in all facets of life. The national movement to reexamine our institutions and systems is also providing us with another opportunity to assess the work we have been doing and to plan for our future.

One area we have already been working hard on is ongoing professional learning for our staff in the areas of equity and cultural proficiency. We engage staff annually in professional development, utilizing both internal and external presenters in addition to CREC Open Choice staff, whom we partner with. Over the past several years, we have provided professional development geared toward equity, diversity, inclusive practices, and cultural competency which have included: combating implicit bias in education; using storytelling as a universal instructional skill that all our students can relate to and therefore benefit from; culturally responsive family engagement, culturally responsive teaching and learning practices; discussing topics of race and culture in English and Social Studies classes at the high school; the “Equity Playlists” -- resources for teachers to utilize at PGS and RBS; implementing restorative practices; and ways to address hurtful, biased comments or actions. Furthermore, we are making a concerted effort across all our grade levels to increase the diversity of literature in our units of study, school libraries, and classroom libraries, in addition to broadening our course offerings and options for students at the high school level (the addition of our Human Rights course last year and our new Civil Rights course this year are two examples). Likewise, all of our schools have conducted “Welcoming Walkthroughs,” a school climate initiative that focuses on ensuring our buildings are culturally responsive, inclusive communities for all students, staff, families, and visitors.

An intentional focus within our district is looking at our learners’ needs in as broad a way as possible – to be stretched, challenged, and supported academically and across the realm of students’ social and emotional learning, which include explicit lessons in the value of diversity and inclusivity. Two years ago, we began the process of researching, developing, and implementing Social/Emotional Learning (SEL) standards and programming. Teachers and leaders across the district have developed an initial draft of PK-12 SEL standards and both of our K-4 schools introduced the Second Step SEL program this past year. In the fall, TBS will implement Second Step for our fifth grade students. Additionally, during this two-year period of time, a committee took the tenets of the Capturing Kids’ Hearts training that all staff had received over the course of a number of years, and developed the EXCEL (Engage, X-plore, Communicate, Empower, Launch) Model. The EXCEL Model is based on the philosophy of building relational capacity, developing leadership skills, and supporting social emotional learning. This was launched last fall at Convocation for all staff and buildings.

3 July 2020

Page 2

In practice, these programs and models manifest themselves as staff teach and work with students to help them grow in the areas of self-awareness and social-awareness, being responsible decision makers, and having the capacity to both self-manage and build quality relationships. Recently, we have seen the deep importance of being able to advocate, listen, share, hear, and adapt as our country works through some of the most challenging times we've seen in our lives. As such, we are proud that the work APS has taken on directly aligns with our need to ensure equity of access for all our learners, and a respect for the wonderful diversity that makes up our schools and our community. That is not just a sentence written because it is the right time to say these things – instead, we have been and are actively working with our students, focused in on statements such as “I can listen to and respect diverse perspectives,” or lessons that explicitly address how students can apply empathy to social interactions, and therefore stand up and help out in challenging social situations.

In addition, we remain focused on our goal to recruit and retain a more diverse staff, by continuing our partnership in TeachCT's effort to recruit certified staff, participating in CREC's minority teacher recruitment meetings, and also actively seek other opportunities to diversify staff across the district.

Having utilized this time to reflect upon what practices we already have in place has also given us pause to think more critically about our future in our equity work. With one of our administrators already sitting on the Equity Council at CREC and an Equity Council in the works here in Avon, we will continue to push our work forward as we enter the 2020-2021 year. We are in the process of defining the work our Equity Council will focus on in the coming year and developing the districtwide membership. We remain committed to racial and social justice and equity for all members of society, not in just talk but in action. We will update you as we push forward in this crucial work.

In closing, this is indeed a journey. It's one we are proud to have already begun as outlined in our mission and our strategic plan and through some of our work described above, but also one that we hope become ever-more ingrained in who we are as a team of leaders, teachers, learners, and families in this shared-responsibility that is public education. As we all prepare for the upcoming celebration of Independence Day, I send this while we remember the values this country was founded on: liberty and justice for all.

I wish you and yours a joyful and safe Independence Day weekend.

Sincerely,

Bridget H. Carnemolla

Bridget Heston Carnemolla, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools

Avon Public Schools
Dr. Bridget Heston Carnemolla
Superintendent of Schools
34 Simsbury Road, Avon, CT 06001
860-404-4700