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WEST ELIZABETH - JEFFERSON HILLS - PLEASANT HILLS

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Director of Finance/Board Secretary  
DR. LINDSAY L. PFISTER  
Director of Human Resources  
ELIZABETH H. WHEAT  
Supervisor of Special Education/Pupil Personnel

February 28, 2019

Dear Parents/Guardians,

The West Jefferson Hills School District is in the process of investigating a racial social-media post circulating by one of our students. This incident runs counter to our core organizational and personal values and will not be tolerated within our schools. We are outraged and saddened by this situation and will continue to work with students and staff to improve our cultural competence and provide more meaningful and impactful discussions on treating each other through the lens of respect, integrity, and empathy. The West Jefferson Hills School District strives to create a safe and supportive environment where ALL students feel welcome and valued.

Because of our core values and the importance of creating an inclusive and welcoming environment, the district has been working on building cultural competence with our students and staff for almost a year. We partnered with Common Sense Media.org to provide ongoing digital citizenship classes to encourage students to engage in appropriate and responsible online behavior. Social-emotional learning and growth has been at the forefront of our district's vision and three-year plan since I arrived almost two years ago.

The district also implemented the Second Step social and emotional learning curriculum for students in kindergarten through eighth grades to receive one lesson a week on topics including empathy, respect, positive relationships and anti-bullying. We also assess students' development in these characteristics and provide interventions where needed by administering the Devereux Students Strengths Assessment (DESSA) three times a year to all K-8 students. In addition, Donald Sheffield, a former director of diversity outreach at Pennsylvania State University, was retained to assist with the implementation of a cultural competency framework and help develop a Multicultural Student Union. Mr. Sheffield met with administration and our student leaders of the Multicultural Student Union last year to hear district-wide issues and begin to develop a framework for action.

While no community is perfect, it is sad to see the actions of a few students tarnish what is otherwise a safe, successful, and supportive student body and school community. We have already met with our student body and plan to engage a diverse group of student leaders along with the Multicultural Student Union to move us forward and create teachable moments through these unfortunate and intolerable acts.

Sincerely,

Dr. Michael Ghilani  
Superintendent

MPG/cal/pjz

It is the policy of the West Jefferson Hills School District to not discriminate on the basis of sex, handicap, age, race, color, and national origin in its educational and vocational programs, activities, or employment as required by Title IX, Section 5094 and Title VI. For information regarding services, activities, programs, and facilities that are accessible to and usable by handicapped persons or about your rights or grievance procedures, contact the Director of Human Resources at 412-655-8450 x2226.