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Forward in Excellence

Dear SHS Parents, Guardians, and Students,

It is rather poignant that I write to you on the 1st of February – the start of the month that is designated in this country as Black History Month. This letter and the start of this month serve as vital reminders that we must remember the sins of our past or be destined to repeat them.

As a follow up to yesterday's letter regarding the discovery of graffiti containing a swastika in our school library, I wanted to share additional information about the ongoing investigation, our response in situations like this, and the work we are doing as a school and a district to assert that Somers does not tolerate hatred in any form.

In terms of our response to circumstances like this, we thoroughly investigate each incident. We interview students, partner with law enforcement, and verify any information that we obtain. In this situation, it was a student who came forward to an adult to report the incident. We are thankful to that student and all students who, when they "see something, say something."

There are many on-going efforts within the district to teach empathy and inclusion. Now in our third year, Somers High School, along with the other three schools in the district, has worked to be recognized as a *No Place for Hate* school. We have also explored and expanded the integration of the Social Justice Standards from Teaching Tolerance into the high school curriculum. Most recently, we conducted an Equity Exploration, K-12, to examine how our school practices and school climate promote equity and inclusion for all students and all groups of students. The results of this exploration will inform the next steps in this ongoing work.

In the academic realm, our students in social studies classes are constantly looking at issues regarding human rights, including an in-depth unit on Human Rights in 10th grade in which students examine human rights violations across the globe and create a unique project researching a topic of their choosing. In addition, our new elective course, *Human Rights*, now in its second year, offers students the ability to go into more depth on human rights issues from the past through modern day. In our English classes, students read novels and study themes of equity, racism, class, gender and difference, all to better understand the human experience.

We also encourage students to take action by joining one of a variety of extracurricular clubs, which focus on identity, diversity, justice, and action. Some of these include the Human Rights Club, Culture Club, R.I.S.E. – Representatives Inspiring Social Equality, Gay Straight Alliance, Girls in STEAM, and S.T.A.T. – Students Taking Action Today. All of these clubs are student generated and come from a deep desire to make a difference in the world around them.

Along with SHS becoming an International Baccalaureate World School, we do this important work in order to promote a safe and welcoming school environment for all students to learn and grow. Our overall goal is to instill in our students a broad and global perspective so they may become productive and positive contributors to society.

It is up to us as a community to stand up against these acts of intolerance, to send an unequivocal message that we will not allow this behavior in our schools or anywhere else. If you have information that might be helpful to our investigation, please contact an administrator or our School Resource Officer, Matthew Hickey. We will keep your name and information confidential. If you would be more comfortable sharing information anonymously, we remind parents and students of our [Anonymous Alert](#) system which can be accessed via our school website.

Thank you again for your support in helping to make this a teachable moment for the students of Somers High School.

Sincerely,

Mark E. Bayer
Principal