February 23, 2024

Dear STGRSD Staff and Families,

I am deeply saddened and troubled by the unfathomable incident of racist bullying involving Southwick Regional School students, which took place on social media outside of school hours, on the night of February 8, 2024. Racism, bullying, discrimination, or prejudice should not be tolerated in any way, shape, or form in our school district and in our communities. The transgressions are unacceptable and clearly violate our district’s mission and core values – most notably respect, responsibility, compassion and integrity.

As we continue to reflect on and cope with the effects of the egregious actions of a few, I can assure you that we are strengthening our commitment to ensuring that the school community is a safe, inclusive place where everyone feels respected, valued, supported, and connected. Diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging has been and will continue to be a key component of the district’s mission and a core component of the District Strategic Plan. The anti-bias programming and training through our collaboration in recent years and months with the Anti-Defamation League and the student Connections group, as well as our anti-bullying curriculum and resources, have been valuable.

Clearly more work needs to be done in these areas. We resolve to increase our focus on fostering a culture where all students learn to adapt, thrive, and uphold the core values that are so integral to our principles. We resolve to ensure that our schools are buildings where everyone shows responsibility, integrity, compassion and respect for all.

To that end, we are planning to hold a summit in the coming weeks with district and community stakeholders from Southwick, Tolland and Granville to begin a conversation about outlining next steps regarding our collective responsibility to lead, work, teach, parent, live and act with kindness, which is the foundation of our core values.

Please join me in continuing to support each other and our students as we strengthen our school community and move forward. We are stronger together.

Sincerely,

Superintendent Jennifer Willard