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## A Message from the Superintendent of Schools - Diversity Communications

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June 23, 2020

Dear Irvington School Community,

In recent months we have witnessed the stark racial injustices and inequities that persist across the nation. I want you to know that I have also seen and heard stories recently shared by BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and People of Color) students and alumni who have shared experiences of racism in our own community and schools, and I take them very seriously. I am committed to ensuring that each and every student in this District is valued, respected, and cared for, and has every opportunity to achieve their personal best. We can and must do better.

Change is needed everywhere. While we can impact reform nationally by advocating for shifts in culture and policy, so too must we start this work in our own community, and we must start it now. Over the last few weeks I have had conversations with faculty, staff and parents who are all prepared for the challenging discussions and reflections--and ultimately shifts--that will be required to advance equity in our schools. I am excited about the enthusiasm and commitment, and also the sense of urgency, that members of our community have brought to these conversations.

As we embark on this critical journey, I know that we will benefit greatly from the guidance of expert partners who have extensive experience in guiding organizations to identify opportunities for improvement, and proposing systemic, programmatic, and cultural strategies to initiate change. Over the last year I--along with other stakeholders in the district--have been working closely with [New York University's Metropolitan Center for Research on Equity and the Transformation of Schools](#). This strong focus will build upon important work that was initiated during the 2019-20 school year where each school participated in professional learning focused on diversity and implicit bias, supported by the Metropolitan Center, Welcoming Schools and GLSEN. In addition, the District has worked closely with the Diversity & Inclusion Committee to host a community conversation on racial equity, originally scheduled for March and that will be rescheduled in the very near future.

I am incredibly excited that in the coming week, we plan to formalize a long-term partnership with the Metropolitan Center on a broadscale, comprehensive racial and social justice initiative. I anticipate that this will be a multi-year partnership that will bring our entire community together to ensure a more equitable future for our students and families. To achieve this vision, we will engage all community members including students, alumni, parents, faculty, staff, administration, PTSA and PTSA Diversity Committee, the IEF, and civic and municipal leaders in outlining a strategic approach to realizing the future that all community members deserve.

Guided by facilitators from NYU, our school community will participate in a comprehensive process that will:

- Engage in necessary community-wide conversations this summer to fully understand the challenges before us, including the current and past experiences that students have shared in recent days;
- Undergo a root cause analysis to identify systemic and cultural barriers that exist inclusive of curriculum, co- and extracurricular activities, community programs and other aspects of school-community-home relations;
- Prepare a lead group of staff members to be educated in “train the trainer” [Culturally Responsive Education \(CRE\)](#);
- Offer targeted anti-racism programs and curricula to all students;
- Facilitate community-wide educational programs; and
- Develop a multi-year strategic plan to eradicate barriers to equity.

I am eager to join with the entire community to ensure the Irvington schools are places where each student is safe, nurtured, and valued and that our District provides equitable experiences for every single school community member, every day. We have a lot of work to do, and I am excited to do it in partnership with each of you. In the coming weeks, I look forward to providing an update on the launch of our work and sharing opportunities for you to become involved.

Very truly yours,

Kris

Dr. Kristopher Harrison  
Superintendent of Schools

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