



January 2020

Dear Families and Community Members,

On behalf of Naperville Community Unit School District 203 administration and Board of Education, I wanted to wish everyone a happy New Year. The start of a new year is always a good time to look back on the celebrations and challenges of the year before and look ahead to the exciting work being done within our schools and in the greater Naperville community.

We have much to celebrate in Naperville 203. As the highest performing large unit school district in Illinois, our students and staff continually live up to our District mission. Each day, I witness this in our buildings from our youngest students at Ann Reid Early Childhood Center and our fourteen elementary schools all the way through our five junior highs, two high schools, and transition programs.

While it is my great privilege to serve this community as Superintendent, we have our challenges as well. Racism, hatred and discrimination in any form are not acceptable in Naperville 203. This past fall, one of our schools experienced a very public racist and hateful act. While this was not the first time students in our schools felt the impact of racism and hatred, this incident created a community conversation that I hope will lead us to a better place.

As we look ahead in 2020, I wanted to take a moment to reflect on the work being done in our school community to create an inclusive place for our students to learn and our staff to work. Some of these initiatives began long before the incident this fall, but some of it is a direct result. As most are aware, this began with the creation of a new position and the hiring of Dr. Rakeda Leaks as Executive Director of Diversity and Inclusion in August 2019. This position sits within District leadership and is a collaborator with all facets of administration.

Dr. Leaks spent her first school year listening and learning within all levels of our schools and the greater community. This year, she began implementing plans that included:

- Deep Equity - Aimed at producing the deep personal, professional, and organizational transformations that are necessary to create equitable places of learning for all students. Each school and the District office has an equity team which is comprised of administrators, faculty, and non-certified staff who will participate in the Deep Equity learning process and serve as the equity leaders in their school or department.
- Curriculum Review - In partnership with Midwest & Plains Equity Assistance Center, the curriculum review will help ensure that our curriculum and supporting materials are sensitive to and reflective of the diverse cultures of our student population.
- Staff Trainings - Training substitute teachers and teaching assistants on implicit bias and the impact that has on their experience with students. Facilitating culturally

responsive music education training with all Naperville 203 music teachers. Additional staff trainings are being planned to reach more employee groups.

Community Engagement is also an important part of this process. Dr. Leaks lead the community through two Focus 203 community engagement sessions on Courageous Conversations about Race in November 2019. In response to the incident, the District also participated in a Leadership Forum to Address Community Concerns and to Promote Peace with the Rainbow Push Coalition, DuPage NAACP and Unity Partnership. District leadership also held conversations with Black student organizations from both high schools, and hosted a panel discussion to hear the concerns of students impacted by racism in our schools.

As we look ahead, the conversation continues within our buildings and community. This January, Reverend Jesse Jackson and a panel of Civil Rights activists will speak about Peace and Unity to students at Naperville Central. Dr. Leaks will host a follow-up Focus 203 on Implicit Bias on January 22 and 23. Finally, the S.U.C.C.E.S.S. parent organization will host a guest speaker Ernest Crim III at Kennedy Junior High.

The work of creating an inclusive environment for all at Naperville 203 is far from over and it is my solemn pledge that it will continue until we get it right. We need help though - we need everyone in our community to recognize the importance of this conversation and to join us in our mission to support all students. We want to live up to our District's belief in valuing the dignity and uniqueness of each individual and to do that we need to take long-term sustainable action to make that belief a reality for all students.

Thank you for your support in continuing to be engaged in this conversation. Together we can make a difference.

Sincerely,

Dan Bridges
Superintendent of Schools