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Dear SAU16 parent and guardians,

Recent events in our area and a nationwide spike in acts of racism, anti-Semitism, and hate speech give considerable pause to educators, including all of us in SAU16, who are charged with the task of developing active citizens of our students. Yet it is these very times when we must increase our efforts to ensure that all of our school environments – in the classroom, on the playground, on our buses – are safe and respectful places for every one of our students.

We are committed to being proactive in teaching students what it means to be active citizens in their school communities, to foster respect for diversity, and to reinforce the positive and respectful behaviors. For example, at **East Kingston Elementary School** and **Stratham Memorial School (SMS)**, school-wide implementation of the *Responsive Classroom* program teaches students what it means to be members of a community in which acceptance of all is a key principle. **East Kingston's Stand Up and Speak Out** campaign provides fifth graders with practice being school leaders and modeling citizenships for the rest of the students. At **SMS**, teachers and administrators continually stress a growth mindset philosophy for all learners, based on the belief that all of us are on a journey toward ever more equitable, inclusive, and caring words and actions.

This year's theme for assemblies at **Lincoln Street School (LSS)** is "What's Your Story," promoting diversity and celebrating differences. In addition, **LSS** has also used the *One School, One Book* campaign where each year a book is featured that focuses on diversity and inclusion topics.

Three of our schools - **Main Street School (MSS)**, **Swasey Central School (SCS)** and **Kensington Elementary School (KES)** - use the *Open Circle* program to proactively develop children's skills for recognizing and managing emotions; understanding and practicing empathy; creating positive relationships; and learning problem solving strategies. *Open Circle* helps each of these elementary schools develop a community where students feel safe, cared for and which fosters a respect for diversity.

In addition at **MSS**, teachers read and share with students a variety of text that help them understand the lives of children from diverse cultures. At **SCS** during monthly "Swasey Shindigs," the entire school comes together for a 20-30 minute assembly to build upon school unity. Every assembly is hosted by a different grade or group within the school and includes music, presentations and positive messaging.

The **Kensington Elementary School (KES)** continues its 15 year tradition of celebrating diversity by selecting and honoring the heritage of current students at **KES**. Families share their stories, photos, artifacts and traditions with students to help broaden their worldly perspectives and expose them to life outside of Kensington. Over the years, Kensington students have traveled to Kenya, Russia, South Korea, Ireland, Jamaica, China, India, Italy, France, Spain, Guatemala, Ethiopia, Finland and the Philippines! This year in January, the students at KES will be traveling to the beautiful countries of Croatia and Serbia.

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At **Newfields Elementary School** the students participate in *Sticks and Stones*, a week long residency that uses performance art, music and language arts to outfit young people with tools and strategies to productively interact with individuals who demonstrate bullying behaviors while offering bullies compelling reasons to change their own behavior. *Sticks and Stones* stresses that kindness and acceptance are immensely more powerful and rewarding than the stature one may gain from intentionally harming, intimidating or isolating others.

This year, the **Cooperative Middle School** implemented the Hawk Pride Pledge and during regular Hawk Pride assemblies - organized around themes of Purpose, Respect, Integrity, Determination and Excellence - students are reminded of what it means to be a Hawk.

At both the **Cooperative Middle School (CMS)** and at **Exeter High School (EHS)**, specific clubs and organizations foster equity, diversity, inclusion, respect and compassion. For example, at **CMS**, the Blue Hawk Bunch is a community alliance that meets to promote the understanding and acceptance of differences and building friendships and is a feeder club for the Best Buddies program at **EHS**. **CMS** students participating in the **Diversity Project** raise awareness in the school about diversity so that **CMS** will be a school that accepts all people and where it is safe to be who you are without fear of being judged. Students introduce each other to new foods, cultures, customs, and above all, new friends.

At **Exeter High School**, the *Equality Club* supports LGBTQ students and issues; *Hawkins* focuses on women issues; and *Students Against Bullying* have been leaders in educating students about anti-bullying strategies at **EHS**. In addition, this year the school has rolled out a school-wide behavior matrix that clearly communicates the expectation that students demonstrate respect toward one another around the school.

Students at the **Seacoast School of Technology (SST)** participate in an anti-bullying orientation and are expected to demonstrate a high level of understanding of issues related to anti-bullying practices by the conclusion of the orientation. Additionally, as part of program competencies and part of the Career Ready Practices, teaching students to “work productively in teams, using cultural and global competence” is an expectation at **SST**.

Finally, in this current climate, all SAU16 administrators, faculty, and staff are committed to being increasingly vigilant about the manner in which all members of our school communities treat each other and to hold one another highly accountable for positive and respectful behaviors in all of our school communities.

These are challenging times, but these are also times when we know we can have a strong and positive impact on our students and school communities. We take that responsibility seriously and are committed to doing all we can to ensure our schools are environments that promote respect and individual worth.

Sincerely,

Christine C. Rath  
SAU 16 Interim Superintendent of Schools