

Dear Scarsdale Community,

I wanted to reach out and share some additional information on the recent incidents of offensive and hateful graffiti in our District. Following my introductory words, you will find a letter that went out to the SHS Community last week from Principal Ken Bonamo. The purpose of this letter was to notify students and parents about incidents of graffiti depicting swastikas and other hate speech/symbols found in bathrooms at the High School.

Mr. Bonamo's letter clearly clarifies the work that we have been engaged in in the areas of inclusion and belonging, along with our focus on creating inclusive communities (particularly by the SHS Dignity, Inclusion, and Belonging Team). He also articulates our commitment to addressing these types of incidents head-on, including police involvement.

There is no doubt that student and staff safety, security, and well-being are of paramount concern and a core objective in our work as a District. In fact, during the District convocation this year, I charged our teachers with the following: "As we think about individual and collective goal-setting in advance of our students' arrival, I encourage you to be very intentional about how you will create a safe and inclusive community in which all students feel welcome."

Teachers routinely accomplish this goal by establishing classroom expectations/norms, modeling behaviors of acceptance and inclusion, navigating disagreements, and referring students to counselors and administrators (when concerned about specific behaviors or behavioral changes). Moreover, some of this work is intentionally built into our instruction with curricular ties attached to civic ideals and practices. One notable example is the elementary psychologists' social and character building lessons conducted in grades K-5 every year. These lessons focus on friendship, bullying, abuse, and community-building, to name a few. From elementary through high school, multidisciplinary curriculum is used to instruct students on basic freedoms/human rights and responsibilities, civic participation and engagement, respect and appreciation for diversity, and advocating for self and others.

In the arena of professional development, it should be noted that, among other work, a representative committee of administrators, teacher leaders, and site-based clinicians have been working with Lynne Hurdle Price (of Hurdle Price-Professionals) over the past year on issues of contemplative practice, conflict resolution, and diversity with an emphasis on how to make our schools more inclusive spaces for students and employees.

From a structural standpoint, we also have policies that address issues of safety and inclusion including the Educational Beliefs and Equal Opportunities (0000 series), Code of Conduct and

Student Wellness (5000 series), and Student Supports (8000 series). All Scarsdale Board of Education Policies can be found [here](#).

Additionally, our Code of Conduct expressly clarifies expectations with regard to behavior on and off campus. The Code applies to all students, staff, parents, and other visitors on school property or at school functions. Towards that end, all members of the school community and visitors are expected to act responsibly. When this does not happen, school personnel use restorative (mediation, counseling, and education) and/or punitive (detention, suspension) measures to address violations. It should also be noted that we fully cooperate with law enforcement and follow recommendations and remediations that they propose, when appropriate.

*It takes a village to raise a child* is an African proverb that reminds us that it takes an entire community to ensure our children grow up in a safe and healthy environment. As a District, we view parents, community members, religious institutions, and other community organizations (including Village Administration, the Scarsdale Police Department, and Scarsdale Edgemont Family Counseling) as integral partners in this work. As such, we encourage any concerns relating to students' health, safety, and well-being be reported to appropriate District or school administration.

Finally, it has to be acknowledged that, in spite of our many positive efforts to protect students and staff, there is still work to be done. Mr. Bonamo's letter speaks to the work that is being undertaken at the High School, specifically. It should be noted that similar work is being conducted at each of our schools, which addresses site-specific issues and concerns. As a District we continue to address issues around inclusion as part of numerous committees, including, but not limited to, the District Safety Committee, District Emergency Response Team, District Compact Committee, Dignity for All Students Act (DASA) Committee, and Administrative Council.

We thank you for your ongoing support of our efforts and ask that you continue to work with us to make even greater progress in becoming a District where all members feel welcome, appreciated, and included. The silver lining here is that, as a premier educational institution in our region, we are well-positioned to raise awareness and increase understanding around these issues that can lead to real change both locally and beyond.

Warm regards,  
Dr. Thomas Hagerman

Letter from Principal Bonamo:

Dear Members of the SHS Community:

I am writing with an update on the work of the High School in the area of inclusion and belonging. As a school, we have an ongoing focus on creating inclusive communities. Our ninth-grade teams have learning and social activities that help students transition to the High School. Student teams and clubs, including affinity groups, allow students to find peers with shared interests and to develop leadership skills. Along with the numerous curricular and co-curricular connections to the experiences of persecuted and marginalized groups, just yesterday, our annual Global Citizenship Day featured more than 70 presentations that covered a wide array of topics, including the incarceration of innocent people, the plight of asylum-seekers, and the experiences of Holocaust survivors. The District's focus on belonging will similarly support ongoing work in this area at every level and identify additional programs for students.

Because of the recent incidents of offensive and hateful graffiti found in bathrooms, our bathrooms have been inspected and cleaned during the past week, and we have reported to the police any additional graffiti to include in their investigation. We appreciate the partnership of the Scarsdale Police Department, the work of our custodial staff, and the support of the community as we find a thoughtful and effective way to respond to these incidents. As an interim measure, we will be reading a statement to students in homeroom next week to reiterate that these types of messages are completely inappropriate and potentially criminal in a school setting, or in any setting for that matter, and that we will continue to take these incidents seriously. This continues to be our message and our commitment, though we hope that any such behavior is not incentivized by the attention and reaction these incidents have received. That is an unfortunate and unavoidable potential consequence of transparent communication and faithful reporting.

In addition to the ongoing work in the school, the Dignity, Inclusion, and Belonging Team met this week. The team has existed at the High School for several years to discuss how we could better meet the needs of different groups of students, especially when we have incidents such as those we've been dealing with recently, which have historically been infrequent. The purview of the committee expanded last spring to determine more broadly how we could become an even more inclusive school community and ensure that every student feels a sense of genuine belonging. Our belief is that inclusion and belonging are prerequisites to authentic engagement and thus create an optimal learning environment.

The Team discussed the recent incidents and talked about an action plan on how to move forward. There was a consensus that these incidents must be addressed with educational programming about the impact of hate speech and symbols to raise awareness of their historical significance and current power. There was also a consensus that the team should maintain its

focus on the broader, positive mission of creating a more inclusive environment and effecting a stronger sense of belonging for all students.

To that end, the Team discussed holding focus groups of students to get a sense of their reaction to the recent events and to refine a survey instrument that the Team has crafted. Once these focus groups have been conducted, the Team will meet to review the major themes in their feedback and use that to finalize the survey instrument. The Team plans to administer a school-wide survey by the end of this calendar year and then use the results of that survey to select programming for early 2020. This approach will provide us with the most accurate gauge of student needs and allow us to select programs in addition to those already in place that are likely to be most effective in meeting the goals of this work.

Again, students and families who would like to talk further about these incidents should contact their deans or our youth outreach workers. If you have any information about any of these incidents, please contact me directly.

Sincerely,

Kenneth Bonamo,

Principal