

Remarks by Superintendent Matt Utterback at the school districts fall convocation, North Clackamas School District

As I have repeatedly said each of the past four years, our challenge is making our vision a reality for our students, especially our traditionally underserved student groups. This challenge is becoming even more difficult in our country and in our local communities where political divisiveness has taken on a disturbing tone of hate and bigotry. Today, we are in a political climate like no other where the rules of civility and respect for differing options have changed in dramatic ways. Who lies in the cross roads of all of the discourse are some of our most vulnerable student groups.

In North Clackamas, we have taken huge steps to create inclusive learning communities for our students, staff, and families. We know that much work remains, and we also know the diverse cultures and languages of our community, the honoring and promotion of civil rights for our LGBTQ community, and the inclusivity of our special needs students are a vital asset and an integral part of our shared identity and experience.

As our students return to school they are doing so under a cloud of vulnerability, fear, and confusion. The daily hurtful rhetoric has the potential of producing alarming levels of fear and anxiety among children of color and inflaming gender, racial, religious, and ethnic tensions in the classroom.

We have students who worry about being deported. This fear is tremendous and profound. All students, regardless of whether they are members of targeted groups, are vulnerable to the stress and we know the impact stress can have on academics and behavior.

Each of you has an obligation to each other, to each student, family, and staff member to ensure a sense of safety, respect, and love. Unlike tolerance which would have us acknowledge our differences, love knows that each of us has worth and value – that regardless of our background, race, religion, income, or sexual orientation, love recognizes that we need each other and together we are stronger.

We know that inaction is actually action.

As educational leaders, we must be committed to interrupting when we see or hear offensive, bigoted words and acts.

We must be committed to creating schools and work environments that are protected from discrimination.

We must be committed to communicate, daily, to each of our students that we will protect, advocate for and value them equally no matter their race, gender, gender identity, religion, sexual orientation, language, or ethnicity.

We must be committed to removing barriers and replicate what is working in our school system.

Taking action has a cumulative effect of incremental changes that create a culture of care and a culture of interrupting. When we repeat these actions it creates momentum. When we build momentum we positively change the trajectory and fulfill the promise of each of our students.

In this political climate it can be easy to lose sight of what should guide our actions. Someone recently said that in times of crisis, we don't abandon our values, we double down on them.

In North Clackamas, we value the learning experience of each child.

- We value equity and social justice.
- We value multifaceted opportunities in education.
- We value engagement and collaborative relations with our students, staff, families, and community.
- We value and support excellence and innovation to produce improvement, and
- We value strong leadership at all levels of the organization that promotes and models the mission and vision of the school district.

When we stay true to our equity commitment and double down on these values, we create new and exciting learning opportunities for each of our students. When we double down on these values we listen to our students and adjust our actions based on what we hear. When we double down on these values, we collaborate with one another because we know the end result will be better and stronger when we work together. When we do these things, we stay true to our equity commitment and these values, we give our students hope and a sense that what was once impossible is possible.

You are here in North Clackamas because you've demonstrated an ability to grow and learn. I believe in you deeply. I trust you, your judgment and your ability to move us forward. These are exciting and hopeful times. We are building something very special here and I could not be more proud of the team of employees that work in our district. I brag about you often and people throughout the Northwest are starting to take notice of the work happening in North Clackamas.

Thank you for the energy and passion you bring to your work. Thank you for your efforts to make a difference in the lives of our students and for willingness to act, learn, grow, and move us forward. That is truly inspirational work. Thank you and have a fantastic school year.