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Dear HHS Students and Parents/Guardians:

November 30, 2021

A little more than a year ago, when announcing a new school-wide initiative called the HHS Unity Project, I sent an email to the entire student body that began with this statement: "Hingham High School cannot be a truly great school for ANY student until it's a great school for EVERY student." That message called for help in "building a more inclusive community that is free of racism, bias and prejudice," a school defined by "greater respect, inclusion, safety and equity." Dozens of students and staff members answered the call and subsequently devoted many hours, even on non-school-days like Election Day, Veteran's Day and MLK Day, to help us move closer to that vision. Animated and inspired by genuine belief in the cause, they gave freely of their time and energy. Like their peers in other HHS organizations, including the Diversify our Narrative Club, the Diversity Empowerment Club, People of Color and Allies, and the Black Student Alliance, each of which has been established in the past two years, they personify our school's highest values and give us reason to believe in a better future.

Have these efforts eliminated racism and intolerance from our school community? Of course not. Recent events, both at HHS and elsewhere, remind us that no school is immune to the social evils that pollute the broader society. HHS exists in the real world, where hate feeds on ignorance and young people make mistakes. To admit that these realities will exist forever does not imply that we will surrender to them. Our school will continue to combat hate and ignorance. Our teachers will continue preparing young people for lives of responsible citizenship and service to others. In partnership with the broader community, we will continue to look for new and more powerful ways to accomplish those goals.

Though humbled by the magnitude of the task before us, I am proud to work in a district that has prioritized these issues. Moreover, I hope those who have rightly called for "more than words" in response to recent incidents will find encouragement in 1) the progress made thus far during Year 1 of the district's [Equity & Inclusion strategic plan](#); 2) the prominence of these issues during the [convocation](#) program at the start of the current school year; 3) the relevant and extensive professional development opportunities pursued by Hingham teachers across the district this year; 4) the district's ongoing partnership with [Dr. Darnisa Amante-Jackson](#), a renowned racial equity strategist; 5) strong initial steps toward implementing restorative justice practices, including the training of all Hingham administrators last summer; 6) our high school's recent [National Banner Recognition](#) from Special Olympics for "achieving national standards of excellence in the areas of inclusion, advocacy and respect;" 7) our school's consistent efforts to plan [assemblies](#) that address [relevant topics](#); 8) the consistent implementation of [Handbook policies](#) that hold students accountable for their actions; and 9) the increasing proliferation of [social justice clubs](#) at the high school.

These are just a few examples of the many ways our school breathes life into its values. The work goes on, and will continue to take new forms. Yesterday, before school, I met with HHS teachers to discuss recent incidents. Later in the day, our assistant principals refined the modules that are completed by students during suspensions, thereby reinforcing and strengthening our school's commitment to education, not just punishment, when students fall short of our behavioral expectations and violate our school's core values. Tomorrow, counselors and administrators will facilitate debriefing sessions for groups that were harmed by recent incidents. Next week, during Inclusive Schools Week, we will hold similar debriefing sessions for any other students who are interested in joining the conversation. At the same time, we can be sure that our teachers will be striving to cultivate a sense of belonging for all students, whether they're leading a class discussion about a work of literature, establishing the framework for collaboration in a science lab, or exhibiting teamwork in the gym. We don't always publicize such efforts, but they're happening all the time.

Despite new challenges and obstacles, HHS administrators and teachers will not shrink from the task of building the kind of community we all want. I hope you will join us as full partners and co-creators of the school our students deserve.

Sincerely,
Rick Swanson