A message from the Superintendent:
Racism in our community and the district's role and responsibilities

June 9, 2020

Dear NJUHSD Community:

A little over a week ago, NJUHSD celebrated the graduating Class of 2020 with a unique set of ceremonies at each of our high schools. Despite the circumstances rendered by the worldwide pandemic, the events were filled with celebration and joy among our graduating seniors, their families, and district staff. The completion of an instructional year is usually a time of happiness and the recognition of accomplishment on the part of our students and staff. However, I end this difficult year with great anxiety.

I am very proud of our 2020 graduates and all of our district staff that helped to get them across the stage and turn their tassels. However, I am equally saddened and filled with anxiousness about the state of the country our graduates will be entering as young adults. While our graduates were walking across the stage to receive their diploma, thousands across the country, as well as in our own community, were protesting the murder of Mr. George Floyd, a handcuffed African-American man, at the hands and knee of white Minneapolis police officers.

I want to add my voice to let our students, staff, and community know that we as a district condemn the horrific murder of Mr. Floyd and the many lives lost before him due to racial injustice. The district stands firmly against all acts, beliefs, and systemic supports of racism at any level of our society. They are completely contrary to the vision, mission, and core values of NJUHSD.

As a local government agency, NJUHSD is nowhere near perfect when it comes to this issue. We, like other public institutions in this country, have a long way to go before all aspects of racism, direct and indirect, are eliminated in our district. However, I can ensure our community, and especially those students and families of color that our Board of Trustees, district staff and leadership, and I remain firmly committed to fundamentally changing individual beliefs and institutional systems that continue to condone and support racism in our community.

NJUHSD is not immune from the effects and challenges posed by racism in our country. Four months ago, we witnessed abhorrent bigotry and vandalism directed at one of our African-American staff members. In the
past two weeks, we have even seen some current and former students engage in examples of racism and insensitivity via their social media outlets. Even though these cases were isolated and outside of the district’s legal purview, I am ashamed and deeply disturbed that individuals currently or formerly affiliated with our school district would perpetuate hate and intolerance.

Nevada County’s schools must be part of the solution in creating systems that insure equitable outcomes for all students — especially those who have been historically disenfranchised. NJUHSD’s commitment moving forward is threefold. First, we will listen to our youth to better understand their experiences in our district and how our high schools contribute to their feelings of isolation and pain. Second, we will examine our own biases to ensure that we are not unknowingly contributing to students and families feeling disenfranchised by our system. Finally, the district will continue to build partnerships that serve to dismantle systemic racism within our local systems in both policy and practice.

I am proud of the progress our schools have made on this issue, but much more work lies ahead. In light of what has occurred in our community and across the nation these past months and weeks, this work requires greater focus and attention. I have been counseled by some in our community to “tread softly” on this issue in light of Nevada County’s demographics. Such trepidation, however, would be contrary to the core values of this district and the hard work accomplished before me. More importantly, it would be a great disservice to all of the students we serve now and into the future. On behalf of the district, I invite each of you to join me as we engage in this important work together.

Sincerely,

Brett W. McFadden
Superintendent