

HSE Schools Friday Update #40, Feb. 26, 2021

https://youtu.be/tsbV_spQk7I

RE: Black Lives Matter, CRT

Superintendent Dr. Allen Bourff

“Before I begin my message today just a couple of reminders our school calendar was recently changed to make Monday, March 1st a regular day of attendance rather than an e-learning day and as spring break is just around the corner please note that the CDC has updated its recommendations for international travel students traveling internationally this semester should follow the recommended quarantining protocols that have been added to our operations plan now. As February comes to a close so does black history month but the teaching of black history is not confined to one month a year. We at HSE have spent much of the last three weeks in reflection and discussion of current issues related to black history month and specifically Black Lives Matter. Honest discussion of the historical dynamics that have brought Black Lives Matter as a national movement and an American cause, compels us to examine history through a critical and often uncomfortable lens. We do not experience discomfort when learning about the redlining of communities, the selective distribution of GI Bill benefits after World War II, and so many other oppressive social and political issues then we fail to understand the term white privilege and how that has virtually lifted the cause of Black Lives Matter. Our reflection and discussion here at HSE was catalyzed by my letter to our faculty earlier this month. My letter failed to state unequivocally that Black Lives Matter period. As a social cause it cannot be ignored if we are to equip our students as critical thinkers. I emphasized that for our students to be successful in their post HSE years they must be able to gather information, search for facts, analyze the implications of those facts, and determine for themselves their personal positions relative to social causes of the day. Black Lives Matter is more than political, it is a social and humanitarian cause about which every student will be forming a personal position. For students to understand the background of such a significant social cause a concerted effort in all of our classrooms is required. Our teachers are passionate about the well-being of our students and they strive for equity in their service to our students. Equity means that we provide to every student the resources proportionate to the needs of that student. Equity may mean that we celebrate figures in history that may not have been receiving any attention a generation ago. It may mean that we examine historical periods with a critical eye to the challenges faced by oppressed Americans at the time. And it may also mean that we analyze our own academic and disciplinary data with a critical eye so that we can disrupt patterns of bias or disproportionality. I’ve been reminded that it can be difficult to teach history as we are living it and it can be difficult in the moment to know if a social issue has become political. That is so true. While our teachers build lessons around topics that may be political, they are well aware that it is not our goal to advance political agendas, it is not our goal to diminish injustice either by framing it as a political statement. This may be a current discussion, but it is not a new issue. Criminal justice reform, LGBTQ rights, immigration, nationalism, (and the list goes on) are topics that teachers have navigated over the years to provide their students opportunities to apply their academic skills to authentic real-world challenges. I recognize that discussing social issues in an academic setting can be uncomfortable for parents and even some teachers. It can also create discomfort for families who have been historically marginalized by our community or nation. In the weeks and months ahead we will be reaching out to hear your concerns and solutions as we chart a more equitable path forward. HSE’s

commitment to equity and inclusion is real and we will use this moment of reflection to do our part to end systemic racism and bias by turning the mirror inward and pursuing institutional change. As you may be aware we've recently appointed a new Chief Equity and Inclusion Officer, Nataki Pettigrew. Some of you may know her as she and her husband are Fishers residents and have children who attend HSE schools I've asked Mrs Pettigrew to join me next week to comment on equity and inclusion in our schools and her role in guiding us in that effort. Now I thank you for your attention. Have a great weekend.