August 5, 2020

Dear Royal Oak Schools parents,

As members of the Royal Oak Schools Board of Education, we are committed to providing a safe, nurturing and inclusive learning environment for all students. Fostering a culture of compassion, respect and inclusion is an essential part of providing a well-rounded education while preparing all students for an increasingly diverse and competitive global world.

We wanted to take the opportunity to respond to recent concerns raised about social justice and inclusion in our district and detail our important, ongoing work in this area. We also want to announce plans to get feedback from you, our Royal Oak Schools community, to help us build on what we are doing and take our district to the next level.

Over the past four years, Royal Oak Schools has taken the following significant steps toward improving equity, inclusion and diversity in our district:

• Formed the Cultural Competence Engagement Committee (CCEC) to address social justice issues including race, religion, sexual orientation, special needs, language and poverty. We are excited to have more than 50 new parents and staff join the committee for this school year.

• Set goals and action items that impact significant areas of our district including our curriculum, hiring practices, professional development for staff, and evaluating our response to student behaviors. We will continue to track our progress in these areas in 2020-21, making adjustments as needed.

• Hired a full-time Restorative Practices coach who trains fellow staff members to provide students with skills to resolve conflicts peacefully. The coach will continue working with our students and staff in 2020-21.

• Added culturally inclusive reading materials with lesson plans in all elementary classrooms and new, diverse, culturally responsive core texts in our middle school and high school ELA classes. In 2020-21, the curriculum team will also focus on the area of social studies with an Oakland Schools consultant.

• Provided staff professional development on culturally responsive teaching, race, poverty and social justice. This training will continue in 2020-21, including all newly hired staff.

• Required all staff to complete training with diversity and equity consultant Dr. Jay Marks with a focus on bias training. Diversity and equity training will continue in 2020-21.
• Hired additional full-time social workers trained to provide families and students with specialized social and emotional support. The social workers also provide professional development that equips staff with tools to address unique student needs. Both services will continue in 2020-21.

And we’re not stopping there. At Royal Oak Schools, we have a long-term plan to become a leader in promoting diversity and inclusion by creating an environment that demands education equity and fairness in our schools. This involves listening to our entire school community and providing a forum for all parents to share their thoughts.

To begin gathering your input and feedback, we will conduct a survey of all Royal Oak Schools parents in late August. The district and Board will evaluate the responses in order to continue to communicate our progress and commitments as we work together. This work is ongoing, intentional and vital to our students’ futures, and your participation is essential. There is a standing update on every regular board meeting agenda, and you can find updates posted on the webpage at https://www.royaloakschools.org/community/forward-together/

Concerns have been raised about disproportionate disciplinary action against students of color. We take these concerns seriously. We are supporting Superintendent Mary Beth Fitzpatrick in a thorough review of all disciplinary reports over the last four years. We plan to have her provide a full report with recommendations at a board meeting in September.

Some parents have also raised concerns about having a school liaison officer and SafeEd hall monitors in our district. Officer Joe Yerke has received extensive training on diversity, implicit bias, de-escalation, juvenile behaviors and mental health, ALICE emergency response and more. The SafeEd hall monitors, who work in our middle and high schools, receive comparable training before working in our schools. Student safety is our number one concern as a school board, which is why we plan to keep our liaison officer and SafeEd hall monitors in our district and on duty.

We need the help of our entire community to make this plan a reality. We look forward to a continued dialogue with all Royal Oak Schools parents and stakeholders as we prepare for the new school year.

Sincerely,
Royal Oak Schools Board of Education