

June 3, 2020

To the Eau Claire community,

In the past nine days we have been confronted, once again, by the evidence of racism and inequity within our country and its institutions. I would like to share with you here the message I wrote and delivered at the June 1, 2020 meeting of the school board on behalf of the board and the superintendent regarding these events. We have far to go, but we in the ECASD stand with our community to face these challenges together. Thank you for standing with us to speak out against the injustice faced by the black community -and all communities of color -and to act to create positive change. My message is below.

Sincerely Yours,

Tim Nordin
President, Eau Claire School Board

June 1, 2020

Last week we were all deeply stunned, saddened, and outraged at the senseless murder of George Floyd by Minneapolis police officers. We have watched with heavy hearts as people around the country, including many of us here in Eau Claire, have protested the continued systematic racism that leads to people of color facing danger in simply living within our society. To our black and brown friends, family, neighbors, coworkers, and classmates, we mourn with you, we see your pain, and we join you in demanding justice and change. I, as a white person, cannot fully understand your experiences, but I am here to listen, learn, and lend my voice alongside yours.

George Floyd's murder is only the most recent example of the system of racism on which American institutions are built. This includes the American education system. It is another urgent siren demanding change within our institution. Here in Eau Claire, Dr. Hardebeck, our administration and staff have worked hard to address inequity and honor our community members of color in many ways, adding Hmong language courses and starting the dual-language immersion program being two examples. Just last week in the policy and governance committee, Jim Schmitt and I discussed the need to clearly address equity in our multi-level system of supports and Commissioner Clements and I expressed our support of Dr. Torres' vision of seeing tracking and skill-level based courses eliminated from ECASD. In many ways, ECASD has already been a leader in addressing educational inequity.

Even so, we have far to go. We have achievement gaps in all the same places that nearly every school district in the country faces. We have inequity among racial, gender, special educational groups, and others. And we have a fractured understanding of the true meaning

of equity as opposed to equality that threatens our work to address the former. We are working toward dismantling these obstacles, but we are not yet there. Tonight, I ask for my colleagues on the board, our administration, our staff, and our community to join me in calling for a radical effort to address the inequities in our system, policies, and practices. To be bold in calling out areas that affect our students in systematic ways to rob them of the opportunities given to the privileged many. To no longer settle for simply noting that students of color are underrepresented in some of our schools and many programs or overrepresented in our disciplinary procedures. To instead use our voices to demand results and to hold our district, and one another, accountable for progress.

We cannot do it alone. Our district is predominantly white, and it takes only a glance to see that our board is predominantly white and male. We need to listen to and learn from voices of color, female voices, voices from the LGBTQ community, and others who have experiences that we do not, in order to find and address the inequity of our system. Together we can make change in our district to eliminate the barriers that exist. I am willing to ask hard questions, to have the direct, difficult, and, frankly, un-midwestern conversations that are needed, and I believe that many of you are willing, as well. Will you join me in learning, asking, teaching, following, leading, and acting to make the changes we desperately need? I hope that you will.