



February 10, 2020

To the Middletown community:

Last Wednesday, Middletown High School celebrated Black History Month with an assembly organized by the MHS Minority Student Coalition. The assembly touched on a wide range of topics, including subjects that by their very nature were certain to spark difficult conversations. These included skits that dealt with the etymology of the slur “n-----” and the concept of white privilege.

In the days since, we have heard an outpouring of praise and support from members of the Middletown Public Schools family who were moved by the courage and seriousness with which the Minority Student Coalition tackled the issues at hand. We have also heard concerns about the assembly from some MPS community members which we feel compelled to address in an open and transparent manner.

Over the past several years, Middletown Public Schools have undergone a deliberate and meaningful shift in educational strategy to lift up student voices. Wednesday’s assembly was a student-led initiative whose content was created by MPS students. The process was closely supervised by MPS faculty and its content was approved by MPS administrators; portions of the assembly containing sensitive content were preceded by content warnings, and all students were given the option of leaving and returning throughout the duration of the program.

The point of Black History Month is to teach, learn, and think about Black history. Just like any MPS curriculum, the assembly featured challenging material. It dealt in honest terms with the plain fact that the history of Black people in the United States is a history marked by oppression and violence. The lived experiences of Black Americans have been experiences of inequality, and many forms of that inequality still persist today-- including in the lived experiences of our students. To acknowledge this fact is not intended to shame, divide, or vilify, but to educate. We trust our students to think critically about difficult issues, whether they are presented in a textbook or on a stage.

We likewise believe in the power of conversation and participation to help grapple with difficult issues. To that end, we invite the Middletown community to join a conversation on racial equity and education on **Saturday, February 15, at 7:00 pm at Middletown High School**. This event will readdress and contextualize the content of the assembly, and provide an opportunity for all questions to be answered and all voices to be heard. All are welcome to attend.

Like you, we yearn for a world in which people of all races, backgrounds, and creeds can live in harmony and solidarity-- a world undarkened by the long shadow cast by history. Like you, we believe wholeheartedly that such a day can and will arrive in a community as diverse and compassionate as Middletown. Until that day comes, we will stand behind our students with pride as they do the work of causing the arc of history to bend in the direction of justice.

Sincerely,

Benjamin D. Florsheim
Mayor

Michael T. Conner, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools