



Dear South Huntington Families:

I am reaching out today to share an incident of deep concern that was discovered over the weekend on the Maplewood school grounds. I am speaking specifically of the fact that a swastika, the N-word, and the word bomb were found scraped into a window of the building. Our administration received word of this late Sunday afternoon, while ironically the majority of us were at a regional unity gathering in Hauppauge. Our team immediately contacted the police and ruled out any danger from the bomb word threat. The team also photographed the disgraceful material, and began reviewing video evidence. That evidence is being shared in its entirety with the police, who are taking this situation seriously and feel confident in the leads they see thus far.

While the window has been removed, the pain in our hearts cannot be ignored. I know that I often showcase South Huntington as a model of our American dream and I still believe that characterization in every fiber of my being. However, it would be cowardly for me to ignore the very real racist and anti-Semitic assault on our values that this graffiti represents. I know in the depths of my soul that we are "better than this," but someone among us was not better than this over the weekend, and that is both heartbreaking and troubling.

I've reached out to dear friends in the NAACP, as well as leaders of the Jewish, Christian, and Islamic communities, and they have agreed to remain united despite those who have tried to divide us. In short, the behavior of these few individuals does not represent our people and cannot be allowed to undermine our district's narrative.

The bottom line is that our Nation is on a terrible edge right now, and because of that heightened climate, people are afraid to speak out for fear of having their words parsed and criticized for being too weak, too strong, too emotional, too devoid of emotion, and so much more. That fear of speaking up in our own words and/or expressing love in our community must not result in our silence. The reality is that our hearts tell us that the South Huntington community is still a great symbol of equal opportunity and fair treatment, but this weekend's events tell us that vigilance and hard work are required to keep that American dream alive.

First and foremost, we will work with the police to bring the individuals who placed such a disgraceful blemish upon our school building to justice. Equally important, we will work with our friends and partners in the community and faith-based organizations to enhance our model of inclusivity in the South Huntington family. Additionally, our student services team has added some virtual resources that can help parents work with their children to deepen the conversations surrounding racial equality, acceptance, and understanding. Links to this material, which are designed as a start to what must be a much longer and deeply involved conversation, are attached.

Respectfully,

Nicholas R. Ciappetta, J.D.
President/Board of Education

Dave P. Bennardo, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools

Resources to talk to your children about race and current events:

- Guidance for Family Conversations about George Floyd, Racism, and Law Enforcement (Anti-Defamation League)
- Talking to Kids About Racism, Early and Often (New York Times)
- Talking about Race for Parents & Caregivers (National Museum of African American History & Culture)
- Fantastic Read-Aloud Books for Raising a Brave Generation (embracerace)