

Dear XXXX,

I appreciate the sharing of your views. However, I must admit that I find myself scratching my head, as I'm not sure what your aim is. I sincerely worry that you are making assumptions and drawing conclusions about District 39 that are simply not true.

First, let me address the professional training programs you've written about. As we have stated before, while some panelists we worked with are affiliated with SEED, our teachers are not trained by SEED. We have no plans to establish an ongoing partnership with SEED. These panelists are members of our community and were invited to bring a wide range of qualifications and experiences. One is a staff member at New Trier High School and a school board member in Evanston.

We believe these types of programs help our staff to more deeply consider what a culture of empathy means through their own experiences. Let me give an example from my own personal experience. I am white, I move through the world as white, and I get treated a certain way as a result. I have a very good friend who is black, he moves through the world as black, and he gets treated a certain way as a result. He and I both understand that he does not get treated the way I do. That is the reality of our world. For me to empathize with his experience, I have to understand that I am treated differently than he is, only because of the way I look. This acknowledgement of how each of us is perceived is important for adults. It helps us understand differences and fosters a culture of inclusion in our schools.

I want to emphasize that the programs I'm referring to, and that you write about, were for parents and our adult staff. Adults have a range of experiences and an ability to process subtle points that is much greater than what we expect of our students.

And that's important to remember because of my second point: I need to keep reinforcing that we have no "empathy curriculum." We do have Second Step that is used for supporting social-emotional growth in District 39. Beyond that, as explained in my previous email, we engage students in promoting kindness and connections. Creating a culture of empathy is about developing an understanding of one another and promoting inclusivity. As I said previously: *"Again, there is no curriculum, but a way to help each other be aware and better understand differences."*

The District's empathy initiative is about creating a safe place for students to express their opinions, perspectives, and beliefs, where all students feel respected and included. The approach that is used across the District continues within a context of positivity and kindness toward one another, not shame or oppression. This is evidenced through the activities promoted across the schools such as recognizing small acts of kindness, using kind statements to "fill one another's buckets," and working across grade levels to learn more about each other.

I hope this helps you understand how we think about empathy and inclusion.



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