

STATEMENT OF THE BOARD OF EDUCATION AND SUPERINTENDENT OF THE  
SYOSSET CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT REGARDING RECENT HATE SPEECH VANDALISM

March 18, 2019

Last week was an incredibly trying week for the District and the Syosset community, as we discovered anti-Semitic vandalism inside the High School and, later on in the week, found a racial epithet written on a desk in the High School. We were, at once, devastated, disgusted and incensed that such hate could come from within our walls, from one of our own.

These acts of hate have reopened old wounds caused by the outrageous vandalism and hate speech painted on the exterior of the High School over a year ago. We reached out the Syosset Interfaith Council of Clergy, the Holocaust Tolerance and Memorial Center, Erase Racism, and the Jewish Community Relations Council and we were touched by their responsiveness.

Based on those conversations last year, we added additional opportunities for students to meet with holocaust survivors, instituted new character education programs at all of our secondary schools; forged a training and education partnership with the Holocaust Memorial and Tolerance Center; and ultimately worked toward earning the Anti-Defamation League's "No Place for Hate" designation in all three of our secondary schools.

Our District forged ahead, with purpose, to eradicate ignorance and intolerance. Out of evil, some good had come.

As we did a year ago, last week's events again prompted us to reach out to our allies to discuss recent events, begin a new period of healing, and to redouble our efforts to address hate speech.

We had a candid conversation about how schools, parents, community institutions, and public officials must be aligned. And we spoke about how last week's events were not an indication that Syosset has done too little, but rather that the work is never done. In the coming days, we will be again partnering with the Holocaust Tolerance and Memorial Center on programs for students on the impact of hate symbols and Syosset High School will hold its annual day of Holocaust remembrance.

But those in attendance also agreed while that the symbols we found may be associated with hatred towards a single group, hatred against any is hatred against all. Hate is hate is hate. And small acts of hate are the gateway to unspeakable acts of hate like the events in New Zealand, Pittsburgh, and Charleston.

It is for this very reason that while Federal law prohibits us from talking about student discipline and consequences, we are not precluded from informing the community when it has been a victim of a crime. Make no mistake, writing the n-word, drawing a swastika and other hate speech are hate crimes that victimize an entire community, not just those unfortunate few who encounter them.

Informing the community ensures these acts do not go unnoticed and prompts a necessary community conversation about the increasing prevalence of hate speech and hate groups both close to home and around the world; and about how an Internet that has no conscience accelerates, amplifies and shields the perpetrators.

While we cannot disclose our investigations or their consequences, that does not mean we are not taking action. We always: investigate swiftly, share everything we learn with the Police, and act—guided by the principle that there can be neither tolerance nor lenience where hate speech is concerned. To us, "No Place For Hate" is not just a label in Syosset, it is a mandate.

While these acts happened in a school, they were perpetrated by members of our community. Hate is intended to divide us, but just as happened last year, it will fail. Today's meeting demonstrates that we are united as ever in our diversity of faiths and ethnicities; and these events simply inspire a renewed opportunity to reflect, learn and build a more positive, humane future for ourselves and our children.

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