

HIGHLINE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

December 11, 2008

Memorandum

TO: All Employees
FROM: John P. Welch



John's Journal

Reflections from the Superintendent

We often talk about our cultural diversity in Highline as an asset. Our students are learning in an environment that increasingly reflects the diverse population of our nation and the workplace of tomorrow. We know from new teacher surveys that many of you were attracted to Highline because you want to work with students from many cultures.

Though we share a deep commitment to success for all students from every race and culture, we still have persistent gaps in achievement between white students and students of color. In some instances, those gaps are even growing.

Our vision - preparing all students for college, career, and citizenship - is built on the belief that all children can learn, given the right supports. So we are faced with questions about what we could be doing differently or better to reach students who are achieving below their potential.

We know that children learn best when they feel safe and accepted and when their parents are involved in their education. We want our schools to be welcoming to all students and families; but knowing what that looks like can be complicated when we don't all come from the same cultural norms and experiences.

That is why our cultural competency work is so important. "Cultural competency" is a big buzzword in education today, but essentially what it means to us is *becoming aware of your own cultural identity and how that impacts you in society; understanding the cultures of those around you; and using that knowledge and awareness to improve the quality of education for all students.*

Our strategy is to provide cultural competency training to all employees so that each of us can be more effective in the work we do to serve students and families.

Over the past couple of years, all Highline administrators have attended a number of trainings to help them lead this work in their schools and departments. We have a five-year plan for providing training to all schools and departments. Bow Lake Elementary, Highline High School, and Global Connections began the training in 2007-08, as did security officers, counselors, assistant principals, and social workers. This year, Sylvester, Hilltop, Midway, and several more departments began training. We will bring the training to more schools and departments each year until all staff have received it.

This month, my senior leadership team, school board members, and leaders of some of our community partners, such as New Futures and Para Los Niños, came together for a training called *Undoing Institutionalized Racism*. It made us more aware of "ways of doing business" that have developed over time in just about every aspect of our society - including schools, government agencies, and many other organizations—that present barriers to some people. These barriers can be so much a part of life that most of us don't even realize they are there. We came away from the training with a commitment to address these barriers as we become aware of them, knowing that we *all* benefit when more people in our society are successful and economically secure.

In this season traditionally associated with good will and giving, I encourage us all to spend some time reflecting on how each of us might make life better for our fellow human beings. I wish you a wonderful winter break enjoying the holidays you celebrate with friends and family. I hope to see you rested and re-energized for the New Year in January.