

Statement Read By School Board Chair Chris Vitale at 2-24-22 Special Meeting

I want to begin by saying the past two weeks have been very difficult for our school district.

While world events may be most present on many people's minds today, our school community has been struggling through some significant challenges here at home over the past two weeks, and I don't want to diminish the impact these challenges have had on students, families and staff.

Our school community has been deeply impacted by the events that have taken place-- from the initial accusations of derogatory and hateful language and actions at the high school, to the social media attacks that have been leveled at students, to the protest we saw by an outside group that came to our high school and took over what was meant to be a peaceful student-led walkout, and finally, to the peaceful and impactful student sit-in held on Tuesday, where several MHS students shared their own experiences.

Racism, hate speech and hateful actions, discrimination and bullying have no place in the Minnetonka Public School District. I believe, and I speak for the School Board when I say each of us believes, that there is important work to do in ensuring all students and staff feel safe and feel supported. We must, as a community, come together to learn from each other, to listen to our students, to support our students and each other through these difficult times, and to heal.

The work focused on excellence in belonging and student well-being in our district and within all of our schools is critical. The schools have taken big steps with the work of the belonging committees, the reporting tool developed with students and with efforts for staff professional development. There is more work ahead of us, and each of us here and in our district has a role to play.

Thank you to our outstanding administration, teachers and staff who came together to keep our community safe when it was unclear what the intentions were of the outside group that was protesting at the high school last week. Our staff's incredible work behind the scenes together, along with their relationships with our local law enforcement and others, and the collaboration of student leaders, was commendable.

Thank you to our students, who exhibited patience, calm and order during and after the outside group's event. Thank you to the students who came together this week to share their personal experiences with the administration and with each other. And, thank you to all of the parents and community members who support our students, families and staff every day.

We are evolving together as a school community. Let's work to honor each other's journey as we take these steps, to move forward together, to assume positive intent ... and to listen and learn from each other.

This is an amazing community, and I believe there is common ground for us to find to help our community move forward.

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