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Recently, some online media sites have criticized me and my communication about the Kyle Rittenhouse case and our work to provide an opportunity for students to discuss the events. The criticism has been focused on an internal email to staff as well as comments I made on social media providing advice to school leaders to make a connection to how race and racism played a role in this case. This story was recently picked up by a local news source that cited anonymous criticism as well. While the discussion has mostly occurred on social media among individuals outside of Newton, I feel it is important that you understand my position on the issue.

During my six years at Newton North we have provided opportunities for students and staff to discuss national and local events. Our advisory was designed so that we could provide more opportunities for discussion when events such as this occurred. We have provided professional development and lesson planning to help staff facilitate these conversations as well.

It is critically important that as a school, we acknowledge these events and provide support to our students and staff. This support is especially critical for our students and staff of color who feel and experience these events differently and more deeply. As principal, it is my job to make sure our staff has the tools they need to have these conversations with students, should they wish to do so. Additionally, we must provide the space and support for students and staff to engage in these difficult conversations.

Therefore, while I recognize that others may not have seen this event as a matter of race, it was and is considered a matter of race. This verdict comes in the context of protests highlighting the inequities and the systemic racism in our judicial and government systems. This topic was highlighted especially by people of color who are members of our school community. We have a commitment as a school and as a district to recognize these inequities and to ensure our students have the tools they need to think critically and thoughtfully about these complex issues. As an educator and a leader, I also have a responsibility to provide all members of our school community, including people of color, the opportunity to share their experiences.

Furthermore, just because some people say a situation has nothing to do with race, doesn't mean that they are correct or that their statement should shut down a conversation about race. Both in our school and around the country, communities of color have shared how this case is connected to race and how it highlights the inequities within our justice system. Knowing that we all have different experiences, as a school committed to racial equity, it is important to hear from everyone in our school. It is our diversity that makes us stronger.

In the Newton Public Schools, we are firmly committed to teaching students to think critically, rather than teaching them what to think. Furthermore, our district [Statement of Values and Commitment to Equity](#) (a statement that originated through the efforts of the Newton North Staff) states that we "have a responsibility to ensure that our students, staff, and families of color feel seen and heard." The structure of our discussions about this event was squarely focused on helping students understand the facts of the case, make sense of the complexity, and process their reactions.

I am proud of our staff and students for engaging in these difficult discussions.

Using WIN Block

As you know by now, WIN block is a feature in our new schedule and stands for What I Need. Monday morning students sign up for their three WIN blocks for the week (Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday). During WIN students can either sign up to get school work done, meet with a teacher or counselor for extra help or support, or some sort of enrichment.

At this point in the year, many students are finding the WIN blocks useful. We also know there are many requests from students to make some adjustments to the WIN rules so that they can use WIN even more productively, such as being able to see more than one teacher during one WIN. Due to the size of our school and that WIN is still new, we are taking our time to consider these requests, but please know we hear you. Actually, students will have an opportunity to take a survey Monday during advisory to provide feedback on the new schedule.

We strongly encourage students to find a balance in selecting their WIN choices. While it is great to get all (or most) of your homework completed during the day, consider participating in an option that may help reduce some stress for you, such as our mindfulness WIN options for example. Furthermore, for students who are oversubscribed with enrichment opportunities during WIN, remember to sign up with a teacher who could give you some additional help with something you are struggling with. A great part of the WIN structure is that you can sign up for a WIN block with anyone in a department and they can help you out.

With this, I would also encourage families to ask their students how they are using WIN block. In the near future, we are hoping to provide families with a list of the WIN blocks that a student selects along with Report Cards. We want to make sure that you are able to encourage your student to meet with a teacher for extra help when they need it or find something fun if they are having a stressful time.

Speaking with an Adult

As I shared with you last month, we are concerned about student well-being and mental health this year. Please feel free to reach out to us if you are concerned about your student. As we enter these colder and darker months, it's important to know what resources are available. Your house dean and school counselor are excellent resources to reach out to if you have a question, need advice, or are looking for a resource.

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Additionally, we have observed increases in tensions between students, whether friend groups or non-friend groups. Some of these tensions may occur outside of school or in school. Please make sure that you contact your dean or counselor when you become aware of any such tension developing with your student.

Transfer Students Wanted

Tiger Transfers is a group for students who are new to North. No matter where you are coming from, no matter what year you are, you are welcome to this group if you are new to NNHS and/or the Newton Public School system! Students will engage with others to create a community of support and learn how to access resources and find success in their new school home of NNHS. If you would like to join, please sign up for Ms. Filio's Thursday Tiger Transfer WIN blocks.

Photos from Spirit Week



