

Cherry Hill Public Schools
Cherry Hill High School East
1750 Kresson Road, Cherry Hill, New Jersey 08003-2598
Phone (856) 424-2222



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Cherry Hill East Community,

“Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.”

– Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Cherry Hill High School East is a welcoming learning environment where all students belong. That is our goal. That is what our staff, students and families work toward every day. However, as presented in an [article in the “Features”](#) section of the January 2022 Eastside Edition, a welcoming learning environment is not the lived experience of every East student at all times. As Dr. King reminds us, if any of our students are not feeling welcome that affects the entirety of the school.

As the Principal of East, I am proud of our Eastside staff for their work to elevate student voice. I am also proud of our students for sharing their experiences and for recognizing that all students deserve a school where they belong.

As a high school with over two thousand one hundred students, East provides ample opportunity for diversity. At East, you will find that our students have diversity of thought, diversity of interests, diversity of culture, diversity of size and shape, etc. For some, diversity is viewed through the lens of “differences.” As our students learn and mature, these “differences” increasingly become viewed as strengths. However, along that journey of learning and growing students often lack the appropriate vocabulary and social awareness necessary to have growth-producing conversations about diversity. It was recently suggested to me that this has always been the case in school. “Mean girls” is a real thing. “Kids are mean.” But normalizing this behavior cannot be accepted. I truly believe that a lack of understanding and communication skills is at the heart of these experiences. Eighteen months of interacting with peers through technology has only served to diminish student understanding of differences and their facility with interpersonal skills.

Student learning and growth is at the center of everything that we do as a school. However, students cannot be available for learning if they do not feel comfortable in

class. Students who experience ridicule, as expressed in the Eastside article, cannot possibly provide their full attention and concentration to the academic lesson at hand.

This article calls attention to the reality that we have not achieved our goal, for all of our students to enjoy a welcoming environment where they belong. We have much more work to do and we need help. It is incumbent on all of us to denormalize offensive comments and hateful posts. It is important that all of our students feel the agency to report concerning incidents to the school; I assure you that we follow up on every reported incident.

As a school community, we will respond to the experiences of our students. We will continue to elevate student voice. Through our academic classes, our clubs and activities, and whole school initiatives, we commit to serving each individual student at East. We will intentionally work to strengthen the communication, social skills, and awareness that our individual students need in order to foster the learning environment that all of our students deserve.

Sincerely,

Dennis Perry, Ed. D.

Principal