



Good Morning Neshaminy,

I hope this email finds you and your family well and navigating our “New Normal” as we open the month of July. I am writing today to introduce myself as the Superintendent of the Neshaminy School District and to discuss two pressing issues we, as a community, will address over the next several months. I’ll spare you the autobiography and resume other than to say I am beginning my thirty-fourth year as an educator in Neshaminy. I am myself a product of a Neshaminy K-12 education; my parents moved into Levittown in 1966. Ask around, it won’t take long to find someone who will give you the ‘low-down’ on me.

The events of the past four months impact each of us differently; as individuals, as families, as a community and as a Nation. Most likely, the next four months will yield even more uncertainty. As an educational system, one of our fundamental goals is to provide students and their families with stability. Stability leads to communication. Communication leads to learning. Learning leads to understanding. Understanding leads to so many things such as innovation, change, equity, progress, compassion, etc. It is our goal to open Neshaminy Schools in September with the stability necessary to continue our mission of empowering each student to become a Life-long Learner and a Productive Citizen.

### Civil Unrest surrounding Black Lives Matter and Systemic Racism

Clearly, racism, discrimination and hate have no place in our schools. While I know we work on that goal daily, the next year will see an expanded, systematic effort as part of the District’s Strategic Planning to further prioritize such efforts by reviewing curriculum, data and practices for unseen/unintended achievement and equity gaps. Moreover, our mission of ensuring equity for all students requires us to address and help students overcome inequities beyond the student’s control and with origins outside the Neshaminy School System. It’s what we do; and we can do better.

As an educational institution, Neshaminy plays a significant role in providing students the necessary skills to help them make sense of their surroundings. Not only for the present, but also for future issues they will encounter throughout life. Though stalled by the school closures in March, Neshaminy was expanding our Instructional Core Model to include a parallel and concurrent Social Emotional Model. While the model is not yet complete, I’ve included some foundation elements - borrowed from others - we used as a starting point below. It is clear, that these skills are equally as important as reading, writing and arithmetic for success in today’s World.

## Habits of Mind

### Critical Thinking:

- Be accurate and seek accuracy
- Be clear and seek clarity
- Maintain an open mind
- Restrain impulsivity
- Take a position when the situation warrants it
- Respond appropriately to others’ feelings and level of knowledge



### Creative Thinking:

- Persevere
- Push the limits of your knowledge and abilities
- Generate, trust, and maintain your own standards of evaluation
- Generate new ways of viewing a situation that are outside the boundaries of standard convention

### Self-regulated Thinking:

- Monitor your own thinking
- Plan appropriately
- Identify and use necessary resources
- Respond appropriately to feedback
- Evaluate the effectiveness of your action



### SELF-AWARENESS

The ability to accurately recognize one’s own emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence behavior. The ability to accurately assess one’s strengths and limitations, with a well-grounded sense of confidence, optimism, and a “growth mindset.”

- ▷ IDENTIFYING EMOTIONS
- ▷ ACCURATE SELF-PERCEPTION
- ▷ RECOGNIZING STRENGTHS
- ▷ SELF-CONFIDENCE
- ▷ SELF-EFFICACY

### SOCIAL AWARENESS

The ability to take the perspective of and empathize with others, including those from diverse backgrounds and cultures. The ability to understand social and ethical norms for behavior and to recognize family, school, and community resources and supports.

- ▷ PERSPECTIVE-TAKING
- ▷ EMPATHY
- ▷ APPRECIATING DIVERSITY
- ▷ RESPECT FOR OTHERS

### RESPONSIBLE DECISION-MAKING

The ability to make constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions based on ethical standards, safety concerns, and social norms. The realistic evaluation of consequences of various actions, and a consideration of the well-being of oneself and others.

- ▷ IDENTIFYING PROBLEMS
- ▷ ANALYZING SITUATIONS
- ▷ SOLVING PROBLEMS
- ▷ EVALUATING
- ▷ REFLECTING
- ▷ ETHICAL RESPONSIBILITY

### SELF-MANAGEMENT

The ability to successfully regulate one’s emotions, thoughts, and behaviors in different situations — effectively managing stress, controlling impulses, and motivating oneself. The ability to set and work toward personal and academic goals.

- ▷ IMPULSE CONTROL
- ▷ STRESS MANAGEMENT
- ▷ SELF-DISCIPLINE
- ▷ SELF-MOTIVATION
- ▷ GOAL SETTING
- ▷ ORGANIZATIONAL SKILLS

### RELATIONSHIP SKILLS

The ability to establish and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships with diverse individuals and groups. The ability to communicate clearly, listen well, cooperate with others, resist inappropriate social pressure, negotiate conflict constructively, and seek and offer help when needed.

- ▷ COMMUNICATION
- ▷ SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT
- ▷ RELATIONSHIP BUILDING
- ▷ TEAMWORK



The above is just the beginning of the conversation as together we find a path forward. As an educational institution, it is not our role to convey a particular viewpoint on emotionally charged topics. Telling people what to think, to believe and to do doesn't work. Our role is to "Show students where to look, not tell them what to see." In doing that, we need to make certain we have presented students with a balance of differing perspectives without the influence of our own personal viewpoints. We are positioned perfectly to create the forum to bring differing viewpoints together, build relationships and build understanding and empathy; those are the ingredients for changing hearts and progress-oriented actions.

There are those who will read this email and state I haven't said enough; others will say I've gone too far. Some will search for a particular agenda, ideology or political view. And others will find a single sentence, phrase or word that can be taken in a way I didn't intend. These mindsets only hinder open and honest dialog. Our conversations have become clenched, tense and guarded; paralyzed in some cases in fear of saying something wrong and being perceived in an unintended way.

Until we gather again in September, I respectfully suggest alternative mindsets.

1. Give people who engage in difficult conversations the benefit of the doubt when it comes to intent and language.
2. Question your own knowledge. What don't I know? What don't I understand? What is the basis of other's differing opinions?
3. Do not classify others as good or bad; right or wrong.
4. Don't tell others what to think or do.
5. Build new relationships so others know what's in your heart.
6. Regardless of your personal views, listen to what is in others' hearts; it's rarely evil.
7. Start by simply saying, "Hello."

We may not be able to fix the World, but we sure can improve our corner of it while giving students a model, the skills and empowering each to become a Life-long Learner and a Productive Citizen.

### **Re-opening Schools and COVID-19**

The above words are just that, words. In order to add action to such words, we need to get the 1,100 + staff and nearly 10,000 students of Neshaminy back to school in September. Beginning next week, I will start laying out the planning, scenarios and hurdles of re-opening schools related to COVID-19. Please know, Neshaminy has been working weekly with other school districts in the four-county area along with the Bucks County Health Department and Department of Emergency Management in preparation. Once I can articulate the plans/options, we will survey parents for their thoughts.

Wishing you and your family an enjoyable July 4<sup>th</sup> weekend.

With Neshaminy Pride

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