



November 5, 2015

Dear Richland County Legislative Delegation,

Last week a bad thing happened at a very good school, and we know this affects our entire community. An incident like this will not be easily forgotten and should not be easily forgotten. At the same time, we must also guard against one event overshadowing the wonderful accomplishments of our successful students, teachers and staff.

Our commitment as a district is to move forward from this incident stronger and better than ever. I can assure you that we will strengthen our efforts to provide a safe environment for all students, including work with the Sheriff's Office, our students and our community. Student safety is and always will be the District's top priority.

In 2014 Richland Two formed a Discipline Task Force and a Diversity Task Force focusing on issues that are of national concern as well as areas for improvement in Richland Two. These groups of educators and community members have already made great strides including substantially reducing the number of District suspensions and expulsions. Additionally we have hired a district behavior intervention specialist and a chief diversity and multicultural inclusion officer. Work on developing comprehensive discipline and diversity plans is ongoing. Our progress will continue if we, as a community, have shared responsibility and shared accountability.

In response to questions regarding the student "protest" on Friday, October 30, 2015, at Spring Valley High School, I want to express my support for the school's handling of the student-led activity. Around 10 a.m. about 100 students gathered in the school's atrium to express their opinions about the events of the week. Principal Jeff Temoney addressed the students to let them know that he understood their need to make their voices heard. Then he reminded them that Spring Valley High is all about the business of teaching and learning, and it was time to return to class. Students immediately began returning to class in an orderly fashion and were out of class for a total of approximately 15 minutes. This practice of de-escalation of student-led protests is one that had been communicated with our principals in the past as we learned from the experiences of other schools across the country where similar protests had occurred. The decision is also clearly within Board policy JI, which recognizes that students have certain legal rights and specifically states that they "may exercise their right to freedom of expression through speech, approved time for assembly, petition, and other lawful means."

Debra W. Hamm, Ph.D.

Superintendent
dhamm@richland2.org

I want to assure you that we remain focused on our mission of preparing all students for success by providing meaningful, challenging and engaging learning experiences. At the end of the day, preparing students for success in all stages of their lives is why we are here.

Thank you for your interest and your continued support of our school district.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Debra W. Hamm", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Debra W. Hamm, Ph.D.
Superintendent

c: Richland Two Board of Trustees