**Respect Week Follow Up - Addressing the “N” Word at Julian Middle School**

The students from our Social Justice Club approached us recently to discuss the use of the “N” word here at Julian. After hearing their thoughts and concerns, we decided to hold individual assemblies for each grade level to help educate our students about the history of the word, and address the impact its use has on the culture and climate in our building. During these sessions, which were held on Monday, Tuesday and Thursday of this week, we wanted to make it clear to everyone that using the “N” word at school is inappropriate. We also wanted our students to better understand how the word affects our ability to create and maintain a safe and nurturing learning environment.

While the building administration played a role in the organization and execution of the assemblies, we felt it was critical that our students lead these sessions. With that in mind, I did a brief introduction of the topic, which was followed by Ms. Gordon, our seventh-grade assistant principal, engaging the students in a silent reflection about how the “N” word makes them feel and why they think they feel that way. After the reflection was over, two to three of our student leaders provided information about the history of the “N” word and the ways in which it has been used to oppress black people for the past 400 years. This included utilizing images of slavery and the Civil Rights Movement to help convey both the history and negative connotations of the word. They shared that no “pass” can or should be granted that allows people to use the word. They also communicated that if you are black, you have ownership of the word, but don’t have ownership or control of how it makes others feel. At the end of the presentation, we had students use a Google Form to provide their takeaways from the session.

While the feedback we received from each grade level was largely positive and reflected both an understanding and agreement with the messages that were shared, there was an incident during the sixth-grade assembly on Thursday that I want to address. Members of the Social Justice Club came up on stage toward the end of the presentation to share their thoughts about the assemblies and issues here at school. They were given the chance to speak, after which we finished the assembly and had the sixth graders complete the form.

We will be meeting with the students from the Social Justice Club to talk about their concerns. We will continue to engage in a dialogue with our entire school community about the ways we can work together to create a stronger sense of unity and belonging in our building. We would also appreciate any assistance our families can provide in reinforcing the messages that were shared during the assemblies. By doing so, you can help support our efforts to ensure that everyone at Julian feels safe, welcome and respected.