

Over the past few weeks, our community has been confronted by hateful comments made on social media sites. While these comments fall within the bounds of the law under our 1st amendment right to freedom of expression, the content of the comments challenges our shared community values of inclusivity. A value that rejects racist, bigoted, and hurtful comments and actions against any person or group. How can we insure that all of our students and staff feel represented and welcomed in our learning community? How do we allow for freedom of expression while upholding our own values of being actively anti-racist and creating campus climates and cultures that value all people. I believe the Anti-Defamation League states it best, "the answer to hate speech isn't censorship, it is more speech." The challenge before us than is to amplify voices and messages of acceptance, belonging and care.

I believe this is a challenge, because Hate is easy, it absolves us of the responsibility to engage in honest self reflection, it provides us safety in our ideological "rightness", and worst of all, it allows us to reject learning, learning about the "other", the other religion, the other culture, the other viewpoint, the other perspective. And when we reject learning, we close ourselves off from understanding. Hate is easy. It requires no vulnerability, it requires no contemplation.

Love, acceptance and understanding, on the other hand are hard. These things require us to open ourselves up to new ideas, which in turn, forces us to take a personal inventory of our values and to be honest with ourselves about how we embody those values. Love, acceptance and understanding require that we continuously learn and grow as people. They require that we relinquish a sense of "rightness", of their being just one way of being or thinking.

My vision for our school district is that we provide our students with the tools to embrace love, acceptance and understanding. That we foster curiosity for learning about the "other" and a consistent desire to seek understanding. My vision is that our students put love out into the world they inhabit and reject hate and its easiness and security. That we encourage all students to exercise their agency and speak up for their beliefs, while providing space for others to do the same, in a civil and thoughtful manner.

This past week I witnessed our students personifying my vision as stated above. I witnessed students demonstrating compassion, inquiry and care for one other at Tam's Breakthrough day where students led anti-racism workshops for their peers. These same students facilitated thoughtful discussions at the showing of the film, "I Am Not A Racist, Am I". I believe most of our students already choose love, acceptance and understanding.