

Principal Swanson's Remarks on "Inclusive Schools Week"
Friday, November 30, 2018

Good morning, everybody, and welcome to our first whole-school Student Council assembly of the year. The timing for this assembly is perfect because it gives us a chance to preview our school's recognition of "Inclusive Schools Week," a nationwide event that happens every year during the first week of December. Next week, schools across the country will celebrate the progress they're making in trying to provide the best possible education to an increasingly diverse population of students. This is so important, especially for those students who have too often been left out, whether because of a disability, family income, cultural heritage, gender, language barriers, or any other reason. Obviously, our attention to these issues should hardly be confined to a single week. In fact, I would argue that "inclusion" matters as much as *anything* we do at our school...*ever*.

Here at HHS, we can point with pride to so many impressive accomplishments. The banners and trophy cases alone tell quite a story. If you look around as you walk through the halls, you'll find all

sorts of honors bestowed on our high school by a host of others:

Boston Magazine, the Boston Globe, the MIAA, the College Board, US News & World Report, and even the US Department of Education.

But those honors count for very little if we don't *all* feel like we have a stake in them. Even the Blue Ribbon and the Green Ribbon, both of them hard-won symbols of excellence, lack real meaning if we don't *all* see ourselves in those awards. We've *all* got to feel like they belong to us, or they don't *really* belong to any of us.

This is *our* school. And that's got to be true for everybody...whether you're up here on the stage with me, sitting in a folding chair up front, jammed somewhere in the middle, or standing in the back. It doesn't matter whether you live on Main Street, Gardner Street, Rockland Street, Beal Street, Fottler Road, the Shipyard, or Talbot Ave. in Dorchester. Whether you drive, take the bus or walk here, this is *your* school. Whether you went to Foster, East, South, Plymouth River, or moved here from Michigan; whether you're bound for an Ivy League college, a community college, or no college, this is *your* high school. Whether you dream of a career in medicine, music,

or the military; whether you're preparing to celebrate Hanukkah, Christmas, Kwanzaa or none of the above, this is *your* school. Whether your parents grew up here, or in Connecticut, or in the Dominican Republic; whether they possess a law degree, a PhD, or no degree whatsoever, this is *your* school. Whether your mom speaks English, Spanish, Chinese, Russian, Polish or Creole, you deserve to feel at home here...and your mom does, too. Whether you're in perfect health, or you're battling something that makes every day an uphill climb, this place needs to work for you. Whether you're straight, gay, transgender, or you're not sure yet, you deserve to feel a genuine sense of belonging here. And if you *don't* feel that sense of belonging, *all* of us are diminished because of it.

So I am asking *you* this morning: Are we truly an inclusive school? Are equity and openness the cornerstone values they ought to be? As your principal, I want to answer those questions with a resounding "Yes!" but I also want to be completely honest. There is no question in my mind: We're doing a lot of things right. But the work is never finished. If we're going to be truthful, we have to acknowledge

that we've still got some work to do. And I will need your help if our school is ever going to make that goal become a reality. So throughout "Inclusive Schools Week," and then, during every other week after that, will *you* do *your* part to advance the cause? Will you look at the kid up the street, or the kid at the next cafeteria table, or the kid sitting two rows in front of you right now, and see a person of value? As a friend you just haven't made yet? As a person with whom you share something very meaningful, because you both call this your school? That's what a real "Inclusive Schools Week" (and a truly "Inclusive School") would look like to me. Let's get there, Hingham High. Let's get there together. And let's start right now.