

Statement for February 1, 2017 School Board Meeting

Oftentimes in life we stand at a crossroads with a choice of which direction to take.

Sometimes that direction is not clear.

Other times the direction is so clear that to not act would have lasting negative repercussions.

This is true of the decision I announce today.

I am recommending to the School Board that as of the start of the new school year, August 2017, the South Burlington School District no longer uses “Rebels” or the Rebel identifier as our mascot.

This recommendation has not been made quickly nor has it been made lightly.

However, I make this recommendation with the utmost confidence that this is the best decision – the right decision – for our schools.

Change has occurred since the School Board made their decision about the Rebel identifier about 1-1/2 years ago.

At the time the School Board made the decision based on the information they had.

Now we have additional information to offer our School Board that has led to my recommendation to them.

As Superintendent of Schools, I have arrived at my recommendation having listened to many points of view expressed both publicly and privately by current and past students, staff, families, and community members.

Some of the stories I heard involved references to history, and others shared personal experiences.

All were meaningful.

What has guided my decision today is that I want *all* students to feel safe and included in our schools and in our South Burlington community.

It has become crystal clear to me that the current Rebel identifier is interfering with all students' ability to feel *safe and included* in our schools.

That is unacceptable to me and should be unacceptable to everyone.

This clarity has come through the stories referenced above and through the following:

- training and learning we've been doing as a staff around diversity, equity, and inclusion;
- local and national events;
- a series of surveys conducted both at the high school and after our implicit bias training this fall. They further affirmed my decision and made clear to me that we have work to do in these areas of diversity, equity, and inclusion in our school community;

Additional information that informed my decision entitled "Rebel Identifier" has been made available to you in your packet.

This is not the time in schools to hesitate about decisions that involve inclusion.

World, national, and local events require from each of us a compassionate courage – the kind of courage that refutes the status quo and makes clear to every single student and their family that they are safe and included in our schools.

I am aware that many students who have traveled through our system have recognized themselves as “Rebels” and taken pride in that.

I am not immune to the fact that my recommendation will require a shift in perspective for some.

I have lived here, raised my own children here, and worked here long enough to see the positive impact of being collaborative and inclusive.

I therefore have complete faith in our community that we are up to the challenge of making this change together.

John Dewey is credited with saying, “What the best and wisest [parents and guardians] want for their own child must be what the community wants for all of its children. Any other ideal for our schools is narrow and unlovely; acted upon, it destroys our democracy.”

We are a proud community who cares about every child who attends our schools. My recommendation is that we continue to do so by retiring the Rebel identifier.