

Good morning and thank you for coming. I have a prepared statement and then I will answer a few questions on the topic of Santan Jr High School.

I would like to address all of you in two parts. The first part is related to the snapchat incident that involved students that attend Santan Junior High. The second part will be on the District's stance and how we intend to move forward.

Regarding the incident, the District's investigation concluded that the video was recorded on Friday evening, January 12th, in a private home. Five boys are seen and heard on the video singing along to a song with racist lyrics. With one possible exception, the boys were unaware that they were being recorded. None of the five boys posted the video to social media and none of them participated in the video's dissemination on social media following the posting.

The investigation included lengthy discussions to determine if the District could discipline the students under the District's cyberbullying or other discipline policies. As I stated, we could not find any evidence that they participated in the posting or dissemination of the video. Additionally, we could not find any evidence that these young men had intended their speech to reach the campus to antagonize, bully or intimidate students at Santan Jr High. Nor was there evidence that they intended their hate speech to be directed toward any specific Chandler Unified Student. Therefore, the conclusion was that this incident, while hurtful and offensive, is not within the District's authority to discipline.

I am confident that the news reporters in this room understand the tenets of free speech better than anyone. Just because language is offensive does not give government, and, in this case, a school district the right to limit the speech. The District has concluded that it does not have the right to reach into a private home and impose discipline.

While the District is precluded from disciplining the young people involved, I can assure you that they and their parents are remorseful. I am pleased to say that each parent has addressed this issue proactively with their child, as you would expect any parent to do. Additionally, they are working with us so that we can work with their children to take this opportunity to teach them:

- 1) why the lyrics of this song are so offensive and destructive;
- 2) the ramifications of their actions; and
- 3) the dangers and risks associated with social media.

Also, I am pleased to say the parents will attend with their children.

Following the incident, I believe it is important to note that Santan Junior High School students and staff dedicated one week to the healing process and helping students understand how racist comments hurt individuals and the whole community. Santan Junior High School parents have been

invited to a parent forum to engage in dialog and share input for next steps. Additionally, Santan Junior High School will continue and re-emphasize the following programs and measures already in place:

- Students are encouraged to bring concerns to a staff member for timely action. “Recognize Refuse Report” is referred to as (R-Cubed). This program is presented to the student body four times per year by Santan Junior High counselors. R-Cubed posters are displayed prominently throughout the campus.
- Silent Witness Boxes are located in two areas of the school and students are advised multiple times per year how to share concerns on campus anonymously. A police officer collects and reviews the silent witness reports.
- Students are asked to complete a survey annually to ascertain if they feel safe at school and allow the administration to address any specific concerns.
- Students receive positive messages related to inclusion, bullying, kindness and character weekly by way of their Student News broadcast.
- Staff training for a new program began this year and will be implemented with students in the 2018-2019 school year. “Where Everyone Belongs” is a national program for middle school students to develop student mentors and give mentor students permission to be aware of and report any negative behavior, creating a safer school for everyone.

Now I would like to share the District’s stance and plans for the future. While we may be limited, we are not powerless. At the most recent governing board meeting on February 14th a resolution was adopted with input from our community. While it is posted on the website, I would like to reference portions of it.

The District’s long-standing mission, vision and core values are based upon the unwavering belief that diversity, equity and collaboration on our school campuses and in all District operations are essential.

The Governing Board and Administration condemn the acts of intolerance that recently surfaced on social media and denounce them as contradictory to our core values. Indeed, Chandler Unified School District denounces hate speech defined as communication that carries no meaning other than the expression of hatred for some group, especially in circumstances in which the communication is likely to provoke violence. All of our students and staff, and each of our school community members, deserve to feel safe and valued at all times.

The District reaffirms its commitment to use its influence as a public educational institution to teach leaders, teachers, staff members and students the value of an inclusive community and give them the tools to be culturally competent in our increasingly diverse society. We will continue to work with a renewed sense of urgency to help our youth understand the appropriate use of and risks

associated with social media. Our ultimate goal is to develop a student body that is kind, respectful and responsible.

The Governing Board realizes that this will require time, energy and resources, and the Board is committed to all three.

As part of a District-wide, long-term plan, an administrative position (Director of Equity and Inclusion) will be created to lead the design and implementation of an equity framework to address this effort. The Board will be approving a job description at our next board meeting on February 28th and we will immediately post the position.

The District is currently identifying curriculum and services to successfully guide leadership, staff and students through this equity initiative. The Request For Proposal has been out since February 16th and scheduled to close March 6th. A committee of educators and community will review the programs and make a recommendation to the Governing Board, hopefully by the end of April. It will depend on how many programs they will need to evaluate.

With the guidance of our Director of Equity and Inclusion, the District is committed to take a comprehensive assessment of our school climate, determine our shortcomings and find ways to make improvement.

Having said that:

- 1) Do we have students in our schools using the “N” word? The answer is Yes.
- 2) Have we seen an increase in that word being used? Our administrators have noticed an increase; so either there is an increase of incidents or an increase in reporting. Our students are not immune to what is going on in our society. The filters of some adults in our society appear to be non-existent and our students are mimicking what they see and hear. In fact, 3 years ago, we created a culture committee made up of a diverse representation of employees. We began immediately promoting a message of inclusivity, civility and respect in an attempt to counter what we believed was having a negative impact on our young people.
- 3) Do we need more diversity among our teaching and administrative staff? The answer is Yes. The teacher shortage is well publicized and the shortage among minority candidates is even greater. Our student body of 46,000 currently consists of 5.3 % African American students; 2.2% of our teaching staff and 4.4% of our administrative staff are African American. We are committed to do everything we can to increase the number of qualified minority employees.
- 4) Are the number of minority African American students disciplined out of balance with the number of white students who are disciplined? The answer is Yes. We have been in conversations with the school board for over a year related to these issues. A 2-hour study

session was held on January 24th where the board received a comprehensive look at the district. We reported, for example, that African American students in the nation are 3.8 times more likely to be suspended; in CUSD, they are 2.82 times more likely to be suspended compared to our white students.

- 5) Does our achievement vary across various ethnic groups? The answer is Yes. At that same Governing Board meeting, we reported gaps in achievement. For example, our African American students were 31.3% proficient on the AZ merit math exam. While this is above the State average of 26%, it lags behind our district-wide proficiency rate of 54%. At the conclusion of the study session, the administration was directed to establish measureable goals to address the discipline and academic achievement trends of our minority students. Measureable outcomes will be developed, presented to the board for their approval and become part of our strategic plan Journey 2025. The data will be reported and trended as part of our annual evaluation as a district. You can find Journey 2025 on our website and the results of our inclusion effort will be incorporated into that document, which already measures 32 other areas of focus.

So, as you can see, we have our work cut out for us:

- We have a director to employ;
- Training materials to purchase;
- An advisory board to formulate;
- A curriculum to adopt;
- An assessment to conduct;
- Minority teachers to hire; and
- Parent training sessions to schedule.

Again, the Board has committed the time and resources to make this happen.

In closing, we are reminded that our District is a microcosm of our society and, as a result, we are experiencing the same issues that are challenging our nation.

The Governing Board expects change and I am confident that our teachers, administrators and staff will stand behind them and work hard to make it happen. It is going to take time and we will need the help of many. Our parents will play a critical role, as will all the adults in the community. We need to all be good role models and be aware of our actions and words - especially when children are present.

Our progress and success will no doubt be slowed down by the inappropriate use of social media. So, I am asking the news media to partner with all institutions that work with children and please consider what you can do to help us develop a future generation that will do far better at celebrating and embracing the diversity in each one of us.