

Hello Polaris Community,

It was nice to see so many community members and students a couple of weeks ago at our tech drop-off and personal item pick-up event, even if faces were masked and folks kept their distance. It was also nice to get a glimpse into some of the appreciative messages sent our way during Teacher Appreciation Week; I believe it really helped our staff make the final push through the end of the year.

I typically don't send our community a June Newsletter, but with so much going on right now in our local and global, national, and local communities I thought it may be beneficial to reach out now that this most unusual school year has ended.

I feel as though there is a lot to convey, so I will do my best to break it down by topic:

COVID-19 and the 2020 – 2021 School Year

PSD sent a community-wide email on May 14th that included a survey asking families about possible plans for what our educational opportunities may look like in August, while taking into account the safety of our students, families, and staff. My hope is that you had a chance to fill this PSD survey out prior to the May 22nd deadline.

As you know, Polaris is in a unique situation since we are only one of two K-12 schools within the PSD system, and the other K-12 school is already an established "hybrid" learning model (PGA). Over the past 10 years as a K-12 school principal I have noticed certain structures being developed for elementary schools that don't quite fit our K-12 model. At other times I've seen the opposite, where what works for other secondary schools doesn't quite meet the needs of our K-12 Polaris community.

I suspect that there will be similar circumstances presented to PSD schools between now and August. At Polaris we will probably have options to choose from, each with certain guidelines and regulations that we must abide by; but, we may have some autonomy with what is presented to us as well. As we navigate through these issues over the summer, I will commit to keeping the focus on what is developmentally appropriate and safe for our students, what is manageable and sustainable for our staff, and what is financially feasible during these unstable times.

Colorado / PSD Budget Cuts

Polaris had to cut roughly \$100K from our 2020 – 2021 budget. This news came after our school's budget was initially approved on March 24th, but as you are aware, much transpired at the state level since that date. We have made the necessary cuts thus far, and although it has been difficult to do, we did so in a way that you as a community member may not notice too big of an impact on a day-to-day basis.

I am crossing my fingers that some of the relief coming from the federal level will help alleviate the state's education budget enough that further cuts will not have to be made. But as with many things currently, there is still a lot of uncertainty with the state's budget.

Civil Unrest

I stand with the superintendent regarding her public statement on May 30th [condemning hate and racism within our community](#). Her statement was in response to a racist post made on Instagram by a student from another high school pertaining to the George Floyd tragedy that is currently impacting the country.

This may be a good time to remind your students about the PSD Code of Conduct, specifically, two important sections within the Grounds for Suspension/Expulsion of Students:

1. ***Behavior on or off school property that is detrimental to the welfare, safety or morals of one or more other students, District personnel or other persons, including behavior that creates a threat of physical harm to the student exhibiting the behavior or to one or more other students.***

Students can be held accountable at school for behaviors that they engage in outside of school property or scheduled hours, especially when such behaviors create an unsafe atmosphere for other students attending that school.

2. ***Violation of the District's policy on harassment of students.***

A portion of this policy reads.... *“Any student who engages in harassment of another student based on the other student’s race, color, religion, national origin, ancestry, sex, sexual orientation, or disability shall be required to attend a meeting with his/her parent(s) or guardian(s) and the principal or principal’s designee; be subject to remedial action such as education or counseling, and be subject to disciplinary action up to and including suspension or expulsion.”*

To personally expand a bit here on civil unrest, I’d like to remind us that we all carry biases because we have walked only in our own shoes throughout our lives.

I don’t know what it’s like to have someone suspicious of me and follow me around a retail store because I am black.

I don’t know what it’s like to be followed home or intimidated because I’m walking hand in hand with my partner because I am gay.

I don’t know what it’s like to have someone “cat call” in my direction while adding lewd comments because I am female.

I don’t know what it’s like to be prevented access to a building because I can’t simply walk up their stairs because I am disabled.

I don’t know what it’s like to have a classmate draw a Nazi symbol on my notebook because I am Jewish.

I don’t know what it’s like to put on a blue uniform each day and have someone make assumptions about me because I’m a police officer.

So, even though we only have our own individual experiences to draw from, that does not mean that we are incapable of learning and understanding. Having biases does not mean we are incapable of empathizing with our fellow citizens. And having biases does not mean that any one person is deserving of another person's ire or hatred simply due to their race, color, religion, national origin, ancestry, sex, sexual orientation, disability or occupation.

One thing that I have learned over the years is how much gratitude I would like to express for those who have been disenfranchised, oppressed, or suppressed over the course of history. It is their fight for justice and democracy, their courage, and their voices that have helped us get closer to the ideals that our country was founded on, holding up a mirror to our democracy as if to say, "we could be better."

So as we enter the 2020 – 2021 school year in August, the Expeditionary Learning Design Principles of *Empathy and Caring* and *Diversity and Inclusion* will be weighing heavy on my mind, and I hope to continue learning and growing so that I may gain a deeper understanding of my own biases and in turn make our community the safest place possible for all students.

Polaris is a public school; we are responsible for serving all students who put in for School of Choice and get offered a spot here. We take this responsibility seriously.

Important Dates Attachment

Please know that all scheduled events on the Important Date Docs are subject to being adjusted and/or cancelled. Much like we learned in March when schools were closed, we may conjure up some plans for opening in August with safety and learning in mind, and it could be cancelled at any moment. Additionally, we may open in August only to find that certain aspects of our program will not be allowed or feasible. Please bear with us as we navigate these unpredictable waters.