



## Addressing diversity requires transparency, fidelity, and modeling

The nature of Monroe Township's community, and particularly its rapidly growing diversity, has exceeded even predictions made just a few years ago. What Monroe will look like five years from now is likely to be very different.

What that means is we have to be sure our curriculum is culturally and socially relevant so that all children feel embraced, respected, and honored in the educational process, even as we think about such things as how we develop our school calendar, which holidays we recognize, and what kinds of textbooks we want. Those are important decisions as we create an environment that embraces diversity. Each person's common responsibility, then, is to be certain our community is embracing diversity.

We try to make certain we are as transparent as possible in talking about issues of race, diversity, and cultural significance. It would be easy to let this happen by osmosis, but it is essential to have conversations about who we are, what we represent, and what our core beliefs are. You have to have courageous conversations.

My responsibility as superintendent is to be true to our core values, and as long as we are true to the core values that are infused in our mission and vision statement, it's a matter of doing the work in accordance with what we say we're about. Our decision-making process shows those connections between our action plan, our core beliefs, and what we want kids to know and be able to do. We

use guiding questions in our decision making:

- What does this have to do with where we are going in our mission?
- Does this decision honor our core beliefs?

If the answer is no, then why do it? If the answer is yes, we can be confident we are making the right decisions for the right reasons.

We also began the year in our monthly meeting with an administrative book study of *White Privilege* (Rothenberg, 2004). The book shines the light on things we do organizationally that may unintentionally perpetuate the very things we are trying to change. Principals met in their own professional learning communities to have conversations about who we are, what we represent, and how we deal with our own issues and biases — and about how we have conversations around behaviors we see that may not complement our core values.

In addition, I believe in modeling the behavior I want my principals to emulate and then having the principals model the behavior they want their teachers to emulate. It has a trickle-down effect. I hold professional development with principals, which

includes our summer retreat each year and articles we share throughout the course of the year, and we have conversations about our own professional growth. Principals then spearhead these same conversations at the building level with their staffs at grade-level or full-staff meetings, depending on the content. Courses for our teachers also reflect that same stream of information.



One of the things we've been able to do well is acknowledge change and prepare people by developing a culture that supports systemic change.

### REFERENCE

**Rothenberg, P.S. (Ed). (2004).** *White privilege*. New York, NY: Worth Publishers.

•  
**Kenneth Hamilton (kenneth.hamilton@monroe.k12.nj.us) is superintendent of the Monroe Township (N.J.) School District. ●**