

April 12, 2016

Dear Parents and Guardians:

As some of you may be aware, an essay written by one of our students for an Advanced Placement Language class has caused some consternation because it was targeted toward a specific race of people. I am writing today to let you know what our school has done since becoming aware of this essay, and to ask you to talk to your child about this concern.

First, I believe some context is in order. Students were asked to write a piece imitating the work “A Modest Proposal,” written in the 1700s by Jonathan Swift. In the piece, intended to mock attitudes toward the less fortunate, Swift advocates for poor people to sell their babies as food to the rich as a way to improve their own conditions. He made the argument as a way to point out the brutish behavior of England toward Ireland, and was not seriously proposing the idea.

The assignment, which is done in other AP Language classes in our county as well, is intended to practice the steps of argument and understand satire, both of which are contained on the AP exams taken in the spring. Students were asked to select a subject and construct an essay in Swift’s satirical style, using the ethos (ethical appeals), pathos (emotional appeals), and logos (logical appeals) parts of classical argument.

The student essay in question addresses treatment of African-Americans. Just as one could argue that the content of Swift’s piece was ill-advised and insensitive, such is the case with the content of the student’s piece here. I want you to know emphatically that North County High School embraces and supports all students, with no exceptions. Conversations around sensitive topics such as this, however, are critical to our growth as a school and, ultimately, as a society.

We have had – and will continue to have – those conversations here. I have met with groups of teachers who have expressed concern, and many staff members have also spoken with students who have had questions. We are taking their comments to heart, and will continue these conversations, as well as engage in discussions about the most appropriate ways to move forward.

As you discuss this matter with your child, please reinforce with them the need for meaningful and thoughtful dialogue surrounding this and other sensitive issues. That is how we will move forward together. If you have any questions that you believe we can answer, please do not hesitate to call the school.

Sincerely,

Julie Cares
Principal

JC/bm