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Superintendent

READING MEMORIAL HIGH SCHOOL

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Dear RMHS Families and Staff,

I am profoundly dismayed that I must report a second incident of a swastika discovered in a classroom at RMHS. Yesterday afternoon, a staff member reported to administration that a student found a swastika lightly etched on a desk in a classroom. The graffiti was difficult to see except at a certain angle and lighting. There was no threat written as part of the graffiti. Administration documented the image and the incident response protocol was initiated: The Superintendent, Reading Police and Facilities Department were all notified. The image was removed and a thorough sweep of all furniture in that classroom was conducted. No additional images were found. Facilities conducted a sweep of the building following the last incident, however, they were specifically looking for graffiti drawn in pen, pencil or marker. Following this second incident, RMHS administration will lead a systematic and thorough sweep of the entire building over the next few weeks to ensure, to the best of our ability, no additional graffiti of this nature is present at RMHS. While this is an ongoing investigation, we are uncertain when the image was created because the graffiti was difficult to see except at a certain angle and lighting conditions.

Unfortunately, we continue to have these graffiti related incidents in our schools and in our community. The swastika symbolizes hate and anti-Semitism and there is no place for these types of hateful actions or behaviors in our schools or in the greater Reading community. The actions of one person cannot be allowed to overshadow the tremendous kindness, respect, empathy and acceptance our students, staff and greater RMHS community embody every day inside and outside of the classroom.

Over the past few years, RMHS staff has focused our efforts on making our core values of Respect, Responsibility, Perseverance and Scholarship come to life as we continue to build a community that embraces diversity. Last year, Dr. Anna Ornstein, a holocaust survivor spoke with students at an assembly hosted by our student club A World of Difference, which is

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sponsored by the Anti-Defamation League. We also had students and staff trained as upstanders and RMHS hosted the Unity Project, a very powerful interactive public art project about embracing difference. This year, we began the year with Community Day, which was an entire day devoted to our core values and to building a positive RMHS community. We have further training planned this year for our A World of Difference Club along with several other student leadership organizations such as our Peer Leaders, Rocket Ambassadors and Student Council. Furthermore, just last weekend, Reading residents came together at a rally to speak out against hate and anti-Semitism, which makes the discovery of the graffiti yesterday all the more troubling. In a society that has turned increasingly divisive and polarized, it is crucial that we emphasize kindness, empathy, and respect for difference and continually speak out with a unified voice against hate.

We seek to find those responsible for these acts and we must continue to educate our entire community if we hope to prevent these acts from reoccurring.

On Monday, we will notify students of the incident, and will ask them for any information that might guide us in a direction towards identifying the person(s) responsible for the graffiti. We will continue to use situations like these as teachable moments to help students understand the impact of these hateful acts and to reinforce our core values of respect and responsibility along with kindness, empathy and acceptance.

We will continue to work closely with the Reading Police Department, the Superintendent and the Town of Reading to address this and any future issues. If you have any questions, concerns or information about this incident, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Kathleen M. Boynton

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Principal, RMHS