

Dear Dicken Families;

I have been made aware that some parents in our community are concerned about an initiative that the Dicken Staff has embraced to help close the achievement gap that exists in our building. As a result I am writing this letter to try and address some of the concerns I have received from parents and to clarify information regarding the AA Lunch Bunch groups and their recent the field trip. This is just one of many initiatives that have been put in place to address the individual needs of our students.

As a District and a school, Dicken has been working on Educational Equity Issues and closing the Achievement Gap.

All Ann Arbor Schools are addressing these issues. The district is working hard to raise overall achievement and eliminate predictable achievement gaps between groups of students. Last week the district shared its annual report to the Board of Education regarding achievement and instructional priorities. While we are making progress there is still much work to be done. Differentiated strategies for different groups of students will help us accomplish this very important goal. One size does not fit all students as we consider instructional best practice and learning environments.

When our staff reviewed November Report Card data and Fall MEAP results, we realized we still have a long way to go in closing this gap. Our goal "Achievement for all Students" had fallen short for our African American students who were under performing and not at the same educational learning level in all subjects as other students. As you probably know, this is true across the district, not just at Dicken.

Even though I am the principal of Dicken school, these strategies and interventions were not made in isolation by myself. The entire staff at Dicken decided that we needed to do something different. The staff started to brainstorm, create and then implement intervention strategies to help all underachieving students including our African American students. When new and innovative strategies are put in place for struggling students, achievement for all students rises.

I have spoken about the Equity initiative and the Achievement Gap in the Dicken Data over the last several years and at PTO and Curriculum Night meetings. It has become a state as well as a district mandate to look at data and address these disparities. Both our School Improvement Plan and Title 1 Plan reflect initiatives and strategies to increase achievement for Dicken students. I know that the whole Dicken community values closing the gap as well.

As principal, I serve all the students in our community, but I am also keenly aware of the challenges that African American students face in our schools. All principals across Ann Arbor are striving to learn and implement strategies that will benefit our struggling students and at the same time help all students achieve.

In hindsight, this field trip could have been approached and arranged in a better way. But as I reflect upon the look of excitement, enthusiasm and energy that I saw in these children's

eyes as they stood in the presence of a renowned African American Rocket Scientist in a very successful position, it gave the kids an opportunity to see this type of achievement is possible for even them. It was not a wasted venture for I know one day they might want to aspire to be the first astronaut or scientist standing on the Planet Mars. I also think it's important that you know that I have talked to the children who did not go on the field trip, and I think they have a better understanding of the purpose of the AA Lunch Bunch now, as I hope you do. I'm sorry if any kids were upset by the field trip or my discussion afterwards with them, and I have let them know that.

The intent of our field trip was not to segregate or exclude students as has been reported, but rather to address the societal issues, roadblocks and challenges that our African American children will face as they pursue a successful academic education here in our community.

I want every parent at Dicken to feel comfortable talking to me about these issues, and I will make every effort to help you understand why we as a staff feel this program is important. Please contact me with additional concerns or questions.

Going forward, everyone is welcome to join our school improvement team meetings where we continually look at the data to come up with new strategies to improve the educational outcomes of our students. The next school improvement meeting is May 10, 2010, at 4:00 p.m..

I am committed to all Dicken students. I want to leave a legacy that we have improved educational outcomes for all students so that we have no gaps in academic achievement.

Educationally;

Principal Madison