Dear AMS Community,

This Thursday we have our Anti-Defamation League (ADL) No Place for Hate Parent/Guardian Education (In the AMS library 7:30-9pm, following a 7pm PTA meeting). ADL has already worked with our staff and a group of students and this education night is an opportunity to work together towards the goal of providing a safe, inclusive, and equitable educational experience for all students. This training will focus on the parent/guardian’s role in supporting students around identity-based bullying. We hope to see many of you there.

When we approach the topic of equity as a school, we look at it from many angles. We have been holding discussions as a staff using the framework of windows and mirrors - wanting each student to see mirrors of themselves and windows into those with other identities in all curricular areas. This allows students to feel validated in their own identities and see beyond their own experiences.

As a staff as we look at providing a safe, inclusive, and equitable educational experience for all of our students, we are evaluating how to help all of our students feel connected to our school community and access our curriculum successfully. We value knowing if a student isn’t demonstrating mastery of an essential standard and thus be able to intervene in a timely manner. We are also focusing on building culturally responsive practices. It is not one single thing and it is not simple. Our staff has committed time monthly to continue this work.

In many ways, teachers regularly adjust their practices to meet the needs of students where they are while still working to hold high expectations. Another approach that we regularly look at is how we can shift our overall practices to make learning more accessible to all kinds of learners. For example, not every student may need to write down homework with a visual model, but some do, and all can benefit. Below is one of my favorite visuals of what we can shift on behalf of our students:

In partnership,

Deborah Brill, Principal

Club Corner: Best Buddies

In its 3rd year, Best Buddies helps to create an inclusive school culture for all students by pairing students with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDDs) in relationships with students without IDDs. Students meet every Friday and share experiences that help foster friendships. The past two years, AMS’ chapter has been recognized as the outstanding middle school chapter of Northern California. This club is run by Karen Bonini, Camille Fisher and Sam Haller with support of our para-educators and teachers.
The call for restorative justice and other positive behavior practices is a result of recent research that questions the effectiveness of suspensions in improving school safety and its impacts on student learning. Suspensions are designed to reduce harmful behaviors, act as a deterrent for behaviors, and protect student safety. The U.S. Department of Education released a comprehensive study in 2015 showing that, despite these intentions, suspensions have the opposite impact. In fact, this study showed that suspensions result in lower academic achievement, lower levels of student engagement, higher dropout rates, and continued behavioral struggles.

The Department of Education and Office of Civil Rights have also demonstrated that exclusionary discipline practices disproportionately impact students of color, special education students, and students from low income households. This research and data demonstrates that we must shift away from harmful disciplinary practices if we are to achieve educational equity for all students.

Just as there is strong evidence about the negative impacts of suspension, there are effective alternates to suspension. We will explore what those are next month and how AMS is incorporating those into our school.

-David Haupert
Vice Principal

1 https://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/school-discipline/index.html
2 https://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/school-discipline/data.html

AMS Spotlight: Special Education

The Special Education Department at AMS provides cognitive, physical and behavioral supports so that all of our students can achieve at high levels. We use an inclusion model in which a majority of our special education students receive their supports in the general education classrooms so that all students have access to the same high-quality, standards-based, curriculum and teaching.

Currently, our Special Education Department serves 83 students through a variety of programs, services, and supports. The Department consists of the following team members/roles:

- Assistive Technology Specialist, Jessica Cortes
- Behavior Analyst, Julie Dawson
- Educational Specialist, Karen Bonini
- Occupational Therapist, Cristina Sutinen-Gonzales
- Para-educators, 17 different people
- Resource Specialists, Jessica Hahn-Taylor (6th grade), Rich Ritchie (7th grade) and Joanna Harris (8th grade)
- School Psychologists, Lauren Mueller and Carl Modeste, and Intern Julieta Santana
- Special Day Class (SDC) Teacher, Sam Haller
- Speech Therapist, Roger Hallsten

Our Resource and SDC teachers collaborate with students, families, general education teachers, specialists, para-educators, and administrators to assess students then design and implement supports. An integral part of this work is via our para-educators, who have a wide range of experience and knowledge, with some who have 20+ years of experience in education. Lastly, our specialists support students in accessing the curricula through the development of students’ skills, knowledge and abilities.

We are grateful to have such an experienced and professional team here at AMS!