

October 10, 2011

Dear EMID Board of Directors:

Before taking action on the future of the EMID magnet schools, I ask that you engage in a participatory process that provides opportunity for rich dialogue and deep examination of the complex issues and opportunities surrounding integration. I believe there are several key questions that we have not addressed as a community:

Do we believe that integration is a compelling interest of our region?

Do we believe that integration is a key strategy in moving us toward achieving equitable outcomes for all learners?

Do we believe that eliminating disparities and creating educational equity is a regional responsibility?

Do we value racially integrated schools?

In the 1950s, Edward R. Murrow hosted a radio series titled, *This I Believe*. Today, an international organization by the same name engages people in writing and sharing essays describing the core values that guide their daily lives. As you deliberate on the future of our schools, I reflect on the beliefs central to Harambee's and Crosswinds' existence.

I believe that integration is a compelling interest of our region. Access to equitable, high quality education for all children is a critical obligation of a just, democratic society. Integration is one key strategy that will move our region toward achieving equitable outcomes for all learners. Strong integration policy is a critical component of a larger agenda focused on eliminating disparities and creating educational equity and opportunity for all children.

I believe that racially integrated schools serve as a key structure of opportunity and a foundational element for transforming schools, districts, and communities. Innovation through magnet schools and interdistrict collaboration are essential to school improvement and collaboration. The Statewide Task Force on School Integration found that magnet schools are a widely used tool to promote integration through school choice.

I believe that eliminating disparities and creating educational equity is a regional responsibility. To achieve the full benefit of integrated learning, schools and districts must address structures and systems that serve as barriers to opportunity. Teachers and school leaders need preparation and support to meet the unique educational needs of a diverse student population. Effective integration efforts are not done in isolation. Working to promote racial integration within the limits of a school district's boundaries can be challenging when the student population in the district is overwhelmingly white or students of color. Successful cross-district collaboration is an important component of a regional approach.

I value racially integrated schools. Currently, Harambee and Crosswinds are a key strategy in achieving EMID's vision and mission. Racially integrated schools provide significant benefits to students and communities. The benefits found in racially integrated schools, like Harambee and Crosswinds, include both academic and social outcomes. Intentionally integrated learning environments more fully prepare all students, including white students, for our increasingly diverse workplace and society. True integration creates a diverse and inclusive environment within the school, the curricula, and the classroom. A significant body of social science research show that students in racially diverse classrooms benefit in several ways: deeper ways of thinking, higher aspirations – both educational and occupational, and positive interactions with students of other races and ethnicities. Beyond physical or proximal integration, our actions must also prepare children to reach a level of cultural competence that will allow them to thrive in a diverse world.

I urge you to reinvest in the EMID magnet schools. We can fortify Harambee and Crosswinds while expanding our commitment to providing integrated and equitable learning opportunities for all students in our region. We can focus on ongoing professional development, examination of effective practices, and evaluation of outcomes. We can capitalize on existing expertise and continue to build new knowledge and skills. We can use research to inform our thinking, develop research questions to guide our work, and disseminate research findings to our regional collaborative and beyond. We can lead the development and distribution of knowledge and applications that eradicate existing disparities. We can invest in our region and each other.

This I believe.

With respect,

Kathy Griebel
Harambee Principal