



Lexington High School

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Dear Parents and Students:

I am writing for two reasons: one is to follow up a public address announcement I made at the High School on April 1st, regarding a graffiti incident; and the second is to give you some information about the annual observance, by some of our students and faculty, of a "Day of Silence" late this month.

With regard to the first, I am sorry to report that very early on the morning of April 1st, our custodians discovered some vulgar graffiti written on several campus buildings. The graffiti included swastikas, personal insults directed at me and another administrator, references to two students who were named, a depiction of a skull and crossbones with the date May 7th, a homophobic remark, and, also in the mix, some unflattering remarks about the Red Sox and the Patriots. We refer any graffiti that may be threatening to the police department and to the regional STARS (School Threat Assessment Response Team) police network, which is a specially trained unit that evaluates and investigates threats to school safety. We have relied on STARS a couple of times over the past several years and have found them to be highly effective and extremely helpful.

There will an ongoing investigation to identify suspects in this case. Meanwhile, I want to express the outrage that the school community feels about this violation of our values and of the law. Our community is founded upon the ideas of safety and respect, and incidents such as this will be treated seriously and vigorously. I have asked anyone who has information about this incident to talk to one of the deans or other staff members in the school. Their confidentiality will be observed. I have also urged students who need support to see any of our counselors, deans, social workers, nurses, or other staff members who may be of help.

If I have to contact you with any further information, I will do so; meanwhile, I assure you that the proper steps are being taken to investigate this matter and to ensure a safe campus environment.

The second piece of information I have is to let you know that the annual observance of the Day of Silence by some of our students and faculty will take place on Wednesday, April 30th. The Day of Silence originated some twelve years ago at the University of Virginia among a group of people who wanted to promote a national awareness of the "silencing" that, in their view, gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people experience

when they cannot be open about their sexual or gender orientation for fear of reprisal. Over the years, this event has become recognized at many high schools, as well. The observation of a Day of Silence among some students and teachers (most of whom designate themselves as “vocal,” as opposed to “silent,” participants—in other words, they talk during the day) has been permitted at Lexington High School, under school guidelines and the protection of the First Amendment and Constitutional law. For the past couple of years, the day has come and gone without any improper incident or violation of anyone’s rights. The students and faculty have conducted themselves in an exemplary manner, and we no longer seem to attract the media attention we once did.

There are two basic tenets involved in the Day of Silence: first, the school as a public institution cannot adopt or promote a political position; and, second, the school cannot repress free speech unless such “freedom” has a history of causing significant disruption to education—and that standard is very high. There is a third factor involved in this delicate equation, as well: “hate speech” is also subject to legal constraints. As a result, the High School’s position on the Day of Silence is as follows:

- The Day of Silence is not a school-sponsored event. Normal instructional activities will continue uninterrupted. Teachers will be expected to teach their classes. No “outside groups” or speakers will be permitted on campus during the school day to promote or support the Day of Silence, or to oppose it.
- Because free speech is a Constitutionally protected right in public high schools, students and teachers who wish to wear buttons, tee-shirts, or stickers expressing their personal views will be permitted to do so. (Stickers last year read, “Vocal Supporter” and “Silent Supporter.”) This permission applies to all students, whatever their opinions. The administration discourages messages that are tastelessly communicated, that express threats or hatred, or that single out individuals for ridicule or condemnation. In some cases, administrators may talk with students about the appropriateness of buttons or tee-shirts, in a manner consistent with the policies and regulations of the Student Parent Handbook, the standards of which will prevail.
- Should a student organization that is properly registered with the administration and that has a faculty advisor wish to make information available to other students, it will be permitted to do so in a manner consistent with past practices. That is, with the approval of the administration, a student club or organization may make available information before or after school, or during the lunch periods in the Commons. Classes may not be interrupted for such an activity, and the distribution of religious materials is not appropriate during the school day.

I trust that once again this year respect, tolerance, and good sense will guide our community and that learning will remain our highest priority.

Sincerely,

Michael P. Jones

