

## DISTRICT 202 COMMUNITY COLUMN

By Dr. Lane Abrell  
Superintendent of Schools  
February 2021

Dear District 202 Community,

As we all know, the last 11 months have been a time of significant challenge.

While District 202 (like all school districts) worked hard to address the immediate challenge of the COVID-19 pandemic, we have also worked hard to address a much longer-term challenge – that of racism and the need for equity in our schools and the greater community.

This month, we celebrate and honor the countless significant scientific, cultural, academic, economic, political, and civic contributions people of color have made to our country.

During this time, I'd like to remind our community of some of our own work to make District 202 more equitable, supportive, and welcoming for all our very diverse school district family.

Many of our families today may not remember this, but District 202 used to be a very small, somewhat rural, generally middle class, and mostly homogeneous school district. However, we experienced a period of tremendous growth and demographic and socioeconomic change.

Today, we look a lot like the world around us.

Our 25,000 students and their families are about 52 percent white, 12 percent African American, 25 percent Hispanic, 7 percent Asian, and about 4 percent multi-racial. Our families speak or represent 79 languages this year.

District 202 leadership did a lot of important work in the early 2000s to recognize these changes and better support and serve our changing student enrollment. Unfortunately, most of that work came to a halt during the Great Recession as we focused on simply continuing normal operations with severely reduced funding.

However, we resumed this important work in 2018, when we formed our Cultural Competency Committee.

The CCC comprises teachers, administrators, parents, and even students of many ethnic, racial, religious, and experiential backgrounds.

In its short life, this group of dedicated District 202 community members has achieved numerous significant goals to improve cultural awareness and sensitivity among our staff and students. So far, they have focused on staff professional development, curriculum, and communications, looking at these key areas through the lens of cultural diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Future work will continue to focus on initiatives to improve student representation and disciplinary procedures, increase staff diversity, and producing more and better diversity resources for parents, students, and staff.

Importantly, while most of the work done so far has happened at the district level, there are also CCC committees now at each of our 30 schools.

Each of those building-level committees is likewise charged and empowered to work with building-level leaders to convey this vital commitment throughout District 202.

Simply put, this work cannot, and will not, end up in a report only to gather dust on a bookcase. It must be an integral part of who we are now, and for the future.

I am very proud of the work District 202 and to serve as a member of the CCC. The members of the CCC individually and collectively are making every effort to best serve all our students, so that they will be ready and able to help make the world a better place for everyone.

Together, we will prepare our students for the future.

Dr. Lane Abrell  
Superintendent of Schools  
Plainfield Community Consolidated School District 202