



## North Stonington Public Schools

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Our Goals: *Safe, Valued, Sense of Belonging - Innovative Instruction - Efficient and Transparent Processes*

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Dear North Stonington Community,

I am reaching out to you at this time to share some thoughts about violence in the world. There is the on-going war between Ukraine and Russia and now the conflict between Israel and Hamas. Of course, many other less reported conflicts exist, both between and within many countries. Our first, and most important school district goal in North Stonington Schools, is to “embed practices and procedures throughout the schools and curriculum experiences that ensure all students, staff, and families feel safe, valued and have a sense of belonging”. Safe, valued, sense of belonging. Many people and families on Earth, the only inhabitable planet at the moment, do not feel safe or valued. I suggest that we should not only appreciate feeling safe and valued, if that is the case, but also reflect with empathy upon those that do not, and cannot.

Unfortunately, many people feel unsafe and devalued because of where they live, their race, their personal beliefs, or the resources available to them. Possibly you have personal ties with those directly involved in unsettling situations, or worse. While I do not, I will share a little personal information that has helped mold my evolving perspective on the importance of peaceful connection and collaboration. My sister-in-law was raised in a Ukrainian family and my daughter has a current roommate from Russia. Both are very concerned about the war. My other daughter is teaching in Thailand and has met people from all over the globe, including a good friend from Iran. Recently, there was a fatal shooting just a few hundred yards from her school. She texted and Facetimed us on her commute back to her apartment, worried about what could happen next. Over the years, my wife, Kim, and I hosted guests from Egypt, Netherlands, Germany, Norway, and China. I believe it is so important to learn about and interact with people from different places and backgrounds. By creating those opportunities for ourselves and our young people, we actually increase peace in the world.

It saddens me that many people experience anxiety of not feeling safe and valued. It is tragic that so many are struggling for survival every day. I hope that each of us will act to make others feel safe, feel valued, and feel a sense of belonging, locally, regionally, nationally, and globally. Talking rather than ignoring can be a start.

How to Talk to Your Children About Conflict and War: This publication from UNICEF offers specific tips for families to support and comfort their families.

I am grateful to the Board of Education for adopting the goal of **Safe, Valued, and Sense of Belonging**.

Yours in appreciation and hope,

Troy C. Hopkins  
Superintendent of Schools