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**SALINE AREA SCHOOLS PARTNERS WITH LOCAL POLICE TO BETTER SUPPORT STUDENTS**

On May 25, 2020, George Floyd died while being arrested by the police in Minneapolis, Minnesota. This incident led to local, national, and international outrage, a civil rights investigation, and a murder trial, currently in progress. A release of the verdict is anticipated at 4:30 pm EST today. We are conscious that Saline area citizens will engage in dialogue regarding the outcome.

As a school district and a community, our focus is unity and growth and our responsibility to engage in constructive dialog. The opportunity to make progress exists in the partnership between Saline Area Schools, the Saline Police Department, the Pittsfield Public Safety Department, and Saline and Pittsfield Township residents.

Within the Saline Area Schools, the commitment to combat racial injustice in the schools is strong. We support the collaboration between the educational community and the public safety community. Interim Superintendent Dr. Stephen Laatsch states, "As we further develop our Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) plan, we are grateful for the relationship that we have established over the years with both the Saline Police Department and the Pittsfield Public Safety Department. Their primary goal is to support our students and help them thrive in an often turbulent environment."

Saline High School is located in Pittsfield Township, resulting in the School Resource Officer (SRO) placement by the Pittsfield Public Safety Department. Beyond building positive community-centric relationships, Pittsfield Public Safety recognizes the demand for public safety services to evolve with the needs of the students, staff, and community. The emphasis is on working with school staff and administration to address physical safety and mental well-being. The schools should be safe and accessible for many public events, such as public forums on racial justice.

Further, the Saline Police Department has many focus areas that align with the mission of the collective group. Currently, the Saline Police Department Strategic Planning Committee captures a diverse group of Saline stakeholders to set goals and objectives for the staff to meet over the next five years. Surveys and stakeholder input sessions drive this work.

Also, the Saline Police Department participates in the Reimagining Policing Initiative. The group will merge with the Strategic Planning Committee in the coming months to develop one cohesive, community input-driven roadmap for the police department.

Chief of Police Jerrod Hart is confident that these initiatives bring the various entities together to provide world-class services to staff, students, parents, and communities of all backgrounds. "Now, more than ever, we need to gather differing perspectives, opinions, and experiences to ensure we are providing services our community demands and to ensure that those services are delivered fairly and equitably."

Both law enforcement agencies provide consistent support and a visible presence in our school buildings, public events, and whenever called upon for assistance. We believe that these initiatives collectively bring our various entities together to provide world-class services to staff, students, parents, and communities of all backgrounds.

When hate and bias are left unchecked, they can escalate, resulting in unhealthy outcomes. With an unwavering focus on growth and understanding, Dr. Laatsch feels confident in collaboration with local police and in the district's ongoing DEI work. "We continue to put together a robust DEI framework to support all of our students, but in particular our marginalized social identity groups of students."

We do not have all of the answers, yet, we are committed to making a positive change for all students and the broader Saline community. That progress is dependent on all of us - our school district, government agencies, local businesses, and community organizations - devoted to working together to support our children and provide for a better future. We invite all stakeholders interested in investing in this collaboration to partner with us in these efforts.