



## Equity is the byword as the school year begins

By Charles Bartling on August 28, 2017 - 8:37am

Hundreds of Evanston students—from preschool through high school—will be walking, riding, and biking to the area’s public schools this morning as the 2017-2018 school year officially begins, and both district superintendents have vowed to emphasize equity in this diversified community.

“There is a shared commitment between our administration, teachers’ union, and school board to work collaboratively to further our commitment to equity learning opportunities, and culturally relevant teaching while prioritizing work on early literacy and improving school climate,” declared Evanston/Skokie School



District 65 Superintendent Paul Goren.

Those sentiments were echoed by Evanston Township High School Superintendent Eric Witherspoon, who noted that many elements of the community are mobilizing to do something about what he called an “imbalance” in the community’s social system.

“Beth Emet Synagogue, Second Baptist Church, St. Nicholas Roman Catholic Church, Unitarian Church of Evanston, and others in our faith community are providing leadership to address equity,” he said.

Witherspoon cited the two school districts and the City of Evanston as leading the equity work, but noted that a number of the community’s nonprofit organizations are a critical component of the effort.

“YWCA Evanston/North Shore, McGaw YMCA, Y.O.U., Y.J.C., Moran Center for Youth Advocacy, Evanston Community Foundation, and so many other organizations are investing in equity work,” Witherspoon said.

While ETHS has made “significant progress” in addressing equity issues in recent years, he said, “this year we are taking our work even deeper,” focusing on what he calls “systemic inequalities” facing black male students.

“We are underscoring and confronting the disparities in academic outcomes for black male students,” he declared. “While we have many high-achieving black males who are accelerated honors students at ETHS, the aggregated data for black males has to be our biggest concern.”

The high school superintendent asserted that “as a community, we must collectively confront how a racist society has resulted in black males in America disproportionately having lower incomes, higher dropout rates, lower college graduation rates, high unemployment, shorter life expectancy, higher incarceration, and greater risk of being victims of violence.”

Taking a hopeful look at the school year ahead, Witherspoon said, “we can achieve equity together in Evanston. If not here, then where? If not now, then when?”

His optimism was echoed by Superintendent Goren, who said, “if we all work together, I am confident we can make this the best school year yet.”