

TULLY CENTRAL SCHOOLS
20 State Street, Tully, New York 13159
Telephone: 315-696-6200 Fax: 315-883-1343
<http://tullyschools.org>

MICHAEL P. O'BRIEN
Junior/Senior High School Principal

ROBERT J. HUGHES
Superintendent of Schools

EDWARD KUPIEC
Elementary Principal

PAUL SCHIENER
Junior/Senior High School Assistant Principal

BRADLEY R. CORBIN
School Business Administrator

CRISTY BOBBETT
Director of Student Support Services

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To The Tully School Community,

Last evening I became aware of a growing social media controversy related to a Senior Spotlight feature story, which will appear in the February issue of the district's newsletter. The purpose of this letter is to address this controversy.

For our Senior Spotlight we typically ask students to respond to several questions, one of which is: What challenges have you faced and how have you overcome them? One of the students who will be featured in the February issue of *The Knight Insight* responded to this question by saying: "The biggest challenge that I've faced was growing up gay and coming out. I had to learn how to become comfortable in my own skin and how to stay strong through bullying and all the negative experiences I had while trying to navigate through life."

My original decision was to not include this specific response in this student's Senior Spotlight feature story. I made this decision because I was worried this specific response would stir up additional controversy in our school community, and that this additional controversy would then continue to hinder the work we are doing related to the NYSED Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiative. In hindsight, this was not the right decision for me to make. It was not fair to this student, who has demonstrated great courage and honesty in revealing his struggles and in being true to who he is as a person. I do admire him for that. This was also a decision that also goes against values we are teaching our students, specifically tolerance, acceptance and resiliency.

Regarding the timeline related to this decision, on Thursday, January 6th I asked Mr. O'Brien, our JSHS Principal, to communicate my decision to this student and he did so. This student then posted two videos to TikTok, which I became aware of on the morning of Friday, January 7th. After seeing these two TikTok videos, and discussing my decision with several members of our school community, I changed my mind and decided that we needed to include this student's original statement. Mr. O'Brien informed this student on Friday, January 7th that we would be including his original statement in the February Issue of *The Knight Insight*.

Social media can be a powerful and effective tool for change. It was this student's TikTok videos that led me to reconsider my decision and change course. Social media can also distort reality and be very destructive. I encourage people to keep this in mind when reading some posts and subsequent news articles related to these TikTok videos.

In closing I would like to share another of this same student's Senior Spotlight responses. He was also asked: What has been the best part of your high school career and why." He responded to this question by saying "The best part of my high school career would have to be moving to Tully my

10th grade year. I was really nervous at first, but after only a few short weeks I didn't really feel like the new kid anymore and Tully quickly became my home." I am happy to hear that this student was embraced by the Tully community when he moved here and I suspect that he will continue to be embraced by the Tully community for the rest of his time with us as a Tully student.

Sincerely,

Robert J. Hughes

Robert J. Hughes

Superintendent of Schools