

January 15, 2020

Dear Overland High School community,

All students deserve to feel safe, respected and valued at school. When actions occur that jeopardize student safety and wellness, we have to take action.

We write to inform you about a social studies teacher who is on leave for the investigation of allegations that he created a negative, harmful learning environment for students. Jay Bennish is accused of using offensive and racist language with students that created an environment where students did not feel safe and free to learn. The investigation of these allegations include whether Mr. Bennish used the “N word” in his classroom and acted inappropriately as the adult sponsor of the Black Student Alliance.

The investigation has revealed that he distributed t-shirts that displayed derogatory racist images and language. An image of that t-shirt is included here. The investigation is assessing whether his actions are also in violation of board policies, including anti-discrimination policies.

The district is assessing whether or not it will move toward dismissal of Mr. Bennish. We share this information with you because it is likely to be covered in the media and because, if proven, these actions are harmful and damaging to kids. His alleged actions are not in line with the values of the Cherry Creek School District.

The school has been meeting with students and providing opportunities for them to engage in conversations about race and the impact of this situation on students and school culture. These are challenging, complex issues and we do our students a disservice if we do not provide the safe space for them to reflect on these events and work through their feelings about this subject.

We also thank our parents/guardians for your ongoing commitment to keeping our schools safe and welcoming places for all. Let us work together to take a stand for the values that define Overland High School and all Cherry Creek schools: acceptance, care and respect for diversity.

Sincerely,
Jennifer Perry
Assistant Superintendent of Educational Operations

Carla Stearns
Executive Director of High Schools

