



October 6, 2023

Dear South Orange & Maplewood School District Families,

Thank you all for a great start to the school year! As you know, The South Orange & Maplewood School District (SOMSD) is committed to promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion meaningfully - not just saying the words but also promoting an inclusive school community that creates belonging for all students, families, and staff. Our aim is to build a consistent approach across the District as to how our schools observe and celebrate holidays and special events.

Each year, questions arise from families, students, and staff about what SOMSD schools will be doing regarding Halloween. We believe it is important, moving forward, that we implement a consistent approach that is respectful and inclusive of all families. In trying to determine the right approach for our district, we formulated three crucial questions:

1. Is promoting school-sponsored Halloween activities creating indirect and unintentional financial hardships for students and families?
2. Do school-sponsored Halloween activities violate the dignity of some of our students and families, either culturally or religiously?
3. Does the promotion of school-sponsored Halloween activities create tensions with the equity and access values of SOMSD?

With these three questions in mind, we conducted internal research within our schools to determine what schools were doing regarding Halloween activities, and then, based on that research, we began to explore our next steps in recognizing Halloween. Based on the feedback from our leaders, we are instituting the following procedures as they pertain to schools within SOMSD celebrating Halloween:

- A. We will not have any Halloween-themed events at any SOMSD schools during school hours.
- B. No costumes will be worn during school hours at our SOMSD schools.
- C. Schools can partner with PTAs, HSAs, or other outside organizations to do themed events **after school hours**.
- D. We try to give our School Leaders creative freedom to run their buildings within our expectations. After discussing this important topic with them, we anticipate that all SOMSD elementary schools will eventually have a Fall/Harvest Festival event or themed activities that **can** occur during school time and **can** be held on October 31st. We ask for grace as some schools have already begun working

toward this, while others are in the planning phase for a 2024 Fall/Harvest Festival.

I know this may make some uncomfortable and elicit some challenges across our community. However, in the end, I feel these recommendations align with SOMSD's commitment to building equity, fostering inclusion, and building a sense of belonging throughout our schools.

Thank you for being a valued member of the SOMSD community.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. Taylor', with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

Dr. Ronald Taylor  
Superintendent of Schools

Cc. Board of Education Members