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Celebrating Diversity

David F. Larson, Ed.D.

Superintendent, Glenbard Township High School District 87

I could not help but notice a unique and noteworthy event during the recent Glenbard East High School homecoming festivities. Glenbard East student Kumba Queewa, a refugee from Sierra Leone, West Africa, was selected as homecoming queen.

Kumba is a charming, talented and involved student and was clearly deserving of this honor. What was amazing to me was, despite Kumba not matching the typical hometown girl profile for a homecoming queen, the student body selected her anyway. Without prompting, the students were genuinely exhibiting the key core values that we strive to reinforce, including inclusiveness, empathy, respect and celebrating diversity.

Kumba being chosen as homecoming queen also was symbolic of the larger redeeming values we support as residents of DuPage County. Our recent demographic shifts include greater ethnic, religious and culture diversity, increasing immigrant population and due to the challenging economy, more low income families. Our local communities have not seen these shifts as problems, but as wonderful opportunities to serve, thrive and be enriched. These larger redeeming values are being reflected by:

Our community is home to one of the largest international relief organizations, World Relief. Hundreds of distressed families in transition have been received and embraced. World Relief DuPage provides refugee services and services related to initial resettlement, employment, immigrant legal issues, education and more.

Each of our public schools provides exemplary English as second language programs for those new to our country as they make the transition to being proficient in English.

Our Navigating Healthy Families/Glenbard Parent Series has developed programming of importance for all parents and guardians. We are offering 11 GPS programs in Spanish, and we have translation headsets (all languages) that can be reserved for any of our 40 workshops scheduled for the 2013-14 school year.

Our faith-based community has worked cooperatively in coordinating Public Action to Deliver Shelter (PADS), which provides overnight housing, an employment program and permanent supportive housing.

Our schools provide a multitude of clubs and student organizations that promote cross-cultural awareness and communication, networking, resource sharing among members and diversity of the culture.

Inclusiveness describes how people from all backgrounds are involved, how their perspectives are valued and how their needs are understood. Because adults in DuPage County are modeling what inclusion means, it is no surprise that our students follow their lead. So why wouldn't Kumba be chosen as homecoming queen? She is an engaged, active and thriving member of the senior class. What a great selection for homecoming queen!