

June 10, 2020

To the Editor:

As leaders of local school districts and the Collaborative for Educational Services, we want to express our sorrow and outrage over the deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, Tony McDade and other Black Americans. These deaths at the hands of local authorities are among the most recent and glaring manifestations of the systemic and individual racism that infects our nation. This racism also exists in countless less explicit and yet pervasive ways that perpetuate inequities and contradict our most sacred values of liberty and justice for all. The disproportionate impact of COVID-19 is one example. Another is the lack of equitable access, opportunities, and outcomes in American education. We also acknowledge that Native, Asian, and Latinx people, and immigrants and asylum seekers, are negatively impacted in significant ways.

Here's one truth - racism and other forms of oppression are among our nation's most vital, persistent and challenging issues and have been for hundreds of years. Here's another truth – while our schools have served as great engines of opportunity, they have also served to deny and exclude those less privileged and have reinforced institutional racism in subtle and unsubtle ways. And a third truth – education can, and must be, a catalyst for lasting change.

As educators, we recognize the urgency of these issues. We will work to challenge and educate ourselves. We will strive to find concrete ways to promote social justice and equity in our classrooms, schools, and communities. We will continue to work with others to seek a transformation in our education practices and institutions and in how we treat each other.

All of us must be relentless in our efforts to dismantle systemic racism and other forms of oppression. Americans – including many of us - have made similar commitments before, and then let the press of new urgencies sweep away the laser-focus we need to have on this one. In never-ending news cycles, this must not be a fleeting moment. We must not have this same conversation in two or ten or twenty years. We must not lose more of our fellow citizens to the violence and inequities of racism and oppression. For our students, for the next generation and the one after that, we must not fail.

Over the past weeks, we have witnessed many Americans, locally and in towns and cities across the country, protesting for justice and the elimination of racism and other oppressions. We have seen and we support young people from our own and other schools who are determined to confront injustices and stand with others in efforts to

make things better. We are proud of the leadership of our youth and their capacity for creating lasting change. We as educators can commit in new ways to not only support them with the tools for seeking and creating the equitable and just world we all want to see, but also to listening to them with open hearts and minds.

Signed -

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