

Dear staff,

It's been a week since the senseless death of George Floyd in Minnesota and the subsequent protests across the United States of America demanding an end to systemic racism and discrimination. These protests call for justice, peace and an end to the killings of innocent Black men.

Let me begin by saying, I, Dwayne Tucker, a Black man, am outraged and disgusted. I denounce racism and the unjust treatment of any human being.

As the CEO of LEAD Public Schools, I have chosen to represent you in leadership not only because of my belief in the mission of LEAD Public Schools, but also because I personally represent a percentage of our communities that are outraged right now.

I LEAD because we have a staff and LEAD community that includes staunch advocates for civil and human rights, feminists, members of the LGBTQ community, and social justice warriors. I LEAD because within our diverse LEAD Community, we have a faculty and staff that continues to choose action over inaction for all matters that impact our students, families, and team members; and it is because of this willingness to act, that I am writing to you today in hopes that you will stand with me for our Black communities.

Last year, we kicked off a cultural initiative, "Courageous Conversations," that I believe will be the foundation that leads to success as we maneuver and decide our next and best course of action during this time... at present and into the future. At the heart of *Courageous Conversations* is a community of trust for our organization and, especially, the communities in which we serve that is even more important today than it was yesterday.

In the spirit of *Courageous Conversations*, I would like to pose the following questions:

- How can we as an organization be more than not racist, but rather be anti-racist? How do we make this shift in our day-to-day operations?
- What small things have we allowed to be the focus of conversations that pale in comparison to the issues of systemic racism and discrimination?
- What barriers have we knowingly and unknowingly put between ourselves and others with different life experiences?
- How often have we witnessed foul-play or racism (both covert and overt) and been silent or fearful of having a conversation?
- What fears, biases, stereotypes, and negative thinking are we willing to let go of in order to address these larger issues of race, prejudice, and discrimination that continue to plague our communities?

I pose these questions not only to provoke thought and honest reflection, but also because they are the prerequisites in order for America, and LEAD, to be a proud and inclusive place.

It is my hope as the CEO of LEAD Public Schools that a month from now, a year from now, 10 years from now, that we accomplished what Barack Obama so eloquently articulated in his “A More Perfect Union” speech: *“What would be needed were Americans in successive generations who were willing to do their part -- through protests and struggle, on the streets and in the courts, through a civil war and civil disobedience, and always a great risk -- to narrow that gap between the promise of our ideals and the reality of our time.”*

This leads me to what, now? I believe it is on all of us to do the following:

- We must admit that the recent tragedy that happened to George Floyd in Minnesota is all too frequent of an occurrence in America.
- We must be vulnerable and have more open, honest, and deeper courageous conversations with one another about systemic racism, discrimination, and disparities amongst our communities.
- Fear is oftentimes at the heart of inaction. We as an organization have to reflect honestly, re-visit our LEAD Ethos, and decide how we can replace fear with faith in how we exemplify these behaviors consistently.

At this time it is particularly important that we remember what one of the highest purposes of an education is: to develop empathy for others in our world. We do this:

- by teaching our students critical thinking and analytical skills and how to listen to others' points of view with open minds and hearts;
- by seeking to understand before reacting negatively or violently to others' opinions;
- by questioning, listening and seeing others as valuable and worthy members of the community, no matter how different they may be from us; and
- by modeling these qualities in ourselves. By doing that, we help develop them in our students.
- by engaging our students and families in civic engagement and reminding them of the importance of voting to ensure that our elected officials are accountable to their constituents and their communities to address systematic racism and all forms of discrimination -- actions we can model as adults in our network in support of our communities.

I can think of no higher calling of an educator than to work alongside one's students as they grow into empathic adults ready to participate fully in civic responsibilities of citizenship. If we can commit to the items listed above, we not only can create a more inclusive and culturally sensitive environment for leaders, but we can also begin to model servant leadership and be a source of comfort, support, and understanding for our LEAD students and families.

As a leadership team, we've discussed the best course of action to best address these issues in real time so that there is consistency with our staff members across our network.

America has fallen short of its promises for liberty and justice for all. I am hopeful that our work together moving forward will make these ideals a more consistent reality for ALL. As always, if anyone has any questions or wants to further discuss this or any matter impacting LEAD, don't hesitate to call me.

Sincerely,

Dwayne