

FROM
THE OFFICE
OF THE
SUPERINTENDENT



June 2, 2020

An open letter to our community:

Once again, the senseless death of an unarmed black man — George Floyd — roils our nation in anguish and outrage. Once again, we grieve for the victims and their families, including those of Ahmaud Arbery and Breonna Taylor, and for the horrific acknowledgement of black and brown mothers' worst fear — that our children may be harmed because of the color of their skin.

Black families live daily with the trauma of knowing that nothing we do or the lessons we impart will shield our loved ones from racism. No life activity seems to offer safe harbor: jogging, bird watching, barbecuing, selling bottled water and sitting in one's dormitory have all led to harsh and dehumanizing treatment.

While the pain is felt most acutely by those most personally affected, persistent inequities poison us all. We live, not in isolation, but in community. We are interconnected, intertwined and interdependent. Harm to one of us, harms everyone. The injustices cloaked by the debilitating weight of racial oppression have heightened our frustration. People need to be heard. We must give voice to the voiceless. We must find better ways of living, learning and working together.

We can, and we must, do better. If there is a place in this country that has demonstrated the courage to tackle systemic inequities, it is here in Guilford County. Organizing and collaborative problem-solving are part of our community's collective DNA.

After all, Guilford County is the home of James B. Dudley High School and William Penn High School (now Penn-Griffin School for the Arts), where the first sit-ins by high school students took place in this country. Guilford County is also the home of North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University and the Greensboro Four, who in 1960 had the courage to sit down at a Woolworth's counter surrounded by hatred and hostility, ultimately changing the course of U.S. history.

Ella Baker — American civil and human rights activist — rightly proclaimed: "We who believe in freedom cannot rest until it comes." Each of us must be part of the solution. And, in the spirit of those who came before us, we must stand united in condemning the racism and injustices that delay the perfection of our union.

During the next few days, Guilford County Schools will provide support services for students in grades 6-12. Coordinated by Principal Rodney Wilds of Dudley High School, the small group sessions will be led by district professionals who possess the requisite training and skills to address the social-emotional wellness of our young people. We are planning separate sessions for additional students, GCS parents, guardians and employees, and will share more details in the days and weeks ahead.

Neither our past, nor our present, have to determine our destiny. The vision enshrined in our Constitution and in our Bill of Rights calls us to do more, be more and act more. Our shared survival depends on it. Guilford County, we will rise to the occasion.

For all children,

Deena A. Hayes
Chairperson, Board of Education

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Superintendent of Schools