

Dear JPS Community,

I'm compelled to express my heartfelt grief and sadness in the wake of the senseless deaths of Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and George Floyd. I join the millions of people around the world who seek answers to these lives lost, and who so desperately need to know that their deaths won't be in vain. The sad reality of their deaths is compounded by this awful COVID-19 pandemic and the frustration of having to experience these multiple traumas all at once.

Like many of you, I'm sure, I've spent the last few weeks (years, really), reflecting on the senseless and callousness that led to these deaths, of the promise and potential of these black lives cut short. I've also reflected on my own privilege as someone who has earned a college education and advanced in my career. Even as a black man living in America, I know that my socio-economic status affords me a degree of increased insulation from the daily affronts that many black people experience. Even still, I found myself Whistling Vivaldi this past weekend while out running in my neighborhood. As Claude Steele describes in his text, I found myself actively working to make myself less menacing or threatening to those I passed along the way. I don't share this experience in search of sympathy, but to acknowledge that although I've accomplished and achieved a bit of that American dream, I know that my skin color is often experienced as a liability – and even I struggle to overcome this from time to time.

Like many of you, I have seen the news reports, read the articles, and consumed quite a bit of the social media posts that seem to throw salt on the wounds of racial and social inequities in our country. I have engaged in conversations with brothers and sisters of various racial, ethnic, and social backgrounds, and found us all to be searching for the key to greater understanding and harmony across differences. I've been encouraged by those who have lifted their voices in solidarity and calling for justice AND peace. As I've celebrated others and their actions to fight against injustice, I've challenged myself to determine how I might make a greater contribution.

What occurs to me is that I have an awesome opportunity and responsibility as the superintendent of Jackson Public Schools to protect and prepare our scholars to create the world that we all long for. I reflected on our strategic plan, and specifically our Profile of a JPS Graduate. Far beyond the mathematical and literacy skills, and much more than the knowledge of social studies, the sciences, and the arts, we have pledged to prepare our scholars to change the world with critical thinking skills, communication skills, and a global mindedness that broadens their horizons and provides a much deeper well from which to draw for the challenges they'll face. The Profile is particularly important to me as an educator because it provides a clearer sense of what we're working toward, and it isn't the aim of maintaining the status quo. Our charge is to ensure that the scholar who is called to create a more just society is well prepared to do so.

I do not consider myself an activist, however, I do believe that none of us has the luxury of sitting on the sidelines when it comes to fighting against oppression and systemic racism. And let's be absolutely clear, we've seen far too many examples in this country

of that lethal mix of prejudice and power to know that racism is very much so alive today. My goal in making these statements is not to incite or divide, but to simply name today's condition, and to invite us all to work towards the tomorrow that I know we can achieve.

As I redouble my commitment to the scholars and families in Jackson, my call to action is for each and every educator in this district to join me in preparing the next generation of leaders. One of our core values is the value of relevance and it encourages us all to "learn to connect with each other, the larger community, and the 21st-century world, ultimately developing agency to contribute to positive change in Jackson, in Mississippi, and in the world." In the memories of those lives lost this month and of the enduring legacy of black Mississippians that have gone before, we will work to ensure that they did not die in vain. Far beyond our goals of improving academics and behavior, we have the moral imperative to stretch and mold young minds to become righteous leaders – leaders that will blaze a new pathway forward for this nation and our world – leaders who live up to all of the promise and potential that lies inside them.

Sincerely,

Errick L. Greene, Ed.D.

Superintendent