

## OKCPS Families, Staff & Community -

As our attention and focus shifts from the global pandemic to the widespread community unrest our nation has experienced over the past several days, my heart is heavy. This weekend, I shared this message on my Facebook page, and I've been asked by many to share it with our community as a whole. Yes, it's very personal...but I've never been afraid to share my heart with you.

*"When my spirit is troubled I get counsel from my wife, I pray for clarity and wisdom, and I spend a lot of time reflecting. These are indeed troubling times. I was sickened as I watched George Floyd's life taken from him, utterly dismayed that one human would treat another that way. I was heartbroken to know that a young man like Ahmaud Arbery could lose his life while out for an afternoon jog, seemingly, for no other reason than the color of his skin. My spirit is troubled because I know that I will never be able to fully understand the pain being felt by my Black friends, colleagues and fellow Americans. I will never know the fear and anxiety of a mother who sends her Black son out the door to work, to hang out with friends, or to the store, prayerful that he simply return home safely. Still, I have to do whatever I can do. I have to acknowledge that pain and meet it with purpose. I can commit to working harder to understand, to listening more and talking less, to stepping in when the moment calls for it, to saying out loud to my friends far and wide that I will not tolerate racism or sit idly by in the face of racism. I can make sure that my friends and colleagues know, that while I may not fully understand your pain, you can always count on me to stand beside you..."*

This post was my commitment to myself and to each of you to do better. To reflect. To do more. To act with intention and purpose. And, as we come off of the protests in Oklahoma City, I challenge all of us to take time to reflect. Because if we want to see change, we must all start with ourselves and ask how we can each contribute to a more just society...and then commit to action. What can we do right now to ensure justice, equality, and fairness? How can we listen more, be more considerate, develop deeper relationships, and ask the tough but necessary questions about race and racial inequities in our country? Will we speak up when it's time, or sit silently? Can we commit to learning more about our entire history and how we got to this point in our nation?

OKCPS values our relationship with our law enforcement partners. It gives us a solid ground to build from...by having new conversations, facilitating new or different relationships with our students and families, and moving forward together. But, while this is true, we also strongly and unequivocally condemn the events that unfolded in Minneapolis with the death of George Floyd and actions that have led to the demise of so many other people of color in our nation. We will continue to acknowledge their lives through the progress we make in the education of our students.

As school leaders, it is our responsibility to love and educate all students, to purposefully change the system where the system is flawed, to engage our community in meaningful dialogue, and to be the voices of our young people who may not have a seat at the table to speak for themselves. And, I am proud to work for a Board of Education that has been forward-thinking regarding equity, having implemented a groundbreaking policy in 2017, and launching an Office of Equity in 2019. Today, OKCPS has a team of committed professionals who are focusing on educational equity. We now have a conceptual framework for educational equity in place that covers 10 dimensions of our district operations, and we are increasing training for all OKCPS staff members on topics about equity, mental health, and implicit bias. This is now part of the way we do business. It's not perfect, but it is progress. OKCPS is on a journey toward educational equity.

On Saturday, Mayor Holt took to Facebook to reiterate the importance of unity as we move ahead saying, "...we must also recognize that the protests around the country are not just about George Floyd. They are about injustices that our society must address in every city, including ours. I can't fix

the nation. I may not even be able to fix Oklahoma City. Neither can you. But maybe together we can.”

He’s right. The issues our nation faces are many and none of us can solve them alone...but I do believe that together we can. OKCPS has a strong desire to be a part of the solution when it comes to social justice and the fair and equitable treatment of all people, especially people of color. In fact, I’ve already seen many of our teachers, families, and even our young students out on the front lines using their voices to encourage the change that is so desperately needed.

In our district, all children have dreams. And, we know that now, more than ever, they’re counting on us -- all of us -- to get this right.

Sincerely,

Dr. Sean McDaniel

Superintendent