

An open letter to the students of the Wichita Public Schools,

Over the last week I have spent much time thinking about the right words to share with you following the brutal murder of George Floyd, and the protests that have taken place in our city and across our country.

As a human being, I share the anger, the disgust, the hurt, and the fear that comes from the inequities and discrimination which occur far too often. As an African-American woman, I share the worry that every mother of a black child has when they send their children into the world, praying that they will be judged by their character and contributions to our community, not by their skin color. And as a life-long citizen of Wichita, I wake each day asking myself what I will do to assure that our African American students have the same opportunities as their peers to prosper because of the education they receive in the Wichita Public Schools.

Students, what I want you to know is that I see you – each one of you. I see those of you who proudly and peacefully represented your families, your faith community and your peers in demonstrations this past weekend in Wichita. I see those of you who have achieved greatness while students in our schools. I see those of you who are angry or hurt by senseless violence, economic and food insecurity, or emotional trauma.

I am proud of the work we have done to increase our graduation rate and improve education for all students, but I know that we have so much more that needs to be done. While our African American females exceed the district's graduation rate, our African American males fall behind. African American males are also suspended at a higher rate than peers from other student groups. We know that many of you lack accessibility to computer devices and the internet, both of which are critical for continued success. We also lack the equity and diversity training for all of our staff that must occur in order to make real progress. We must – WE WILL – do better in the future.

Now is our time to break down barriers and reinvent our systems, not return to normal. This work will take on many dimensions, and it will require all of the adults who care about you – our leaders, our teachers, our coaches, our families, and our business partners – to lean into discomfort and agree that action must follow words in order for those words to have any meaning.

Students, you are our community's future. I am committed to doing everything within my power as our district leader to provide you with the education that Nelson Mandela once said, is “the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.”