

JUNE 5, 2020

Building on This Moment to Create a Movement

As I reflect on recent incidents of civil unrest and protests across the country, and indeed across the world, I am angry and heartsick at the realization that time has not “healed all wounds.” Today, we are preparing to send our recent graduates into a world that is facing two pandemics: one of disease and another of clear injustice.

Initially, one might be inclined to associate the current unrest solely with the unfortunate and tragic death of one man, Mr. George Floyd of Minnesota. However, I would offer that we are also grieving our society’s inability to dispense justice evenhandedly, preventing us from finding peace. As we are witnessing, a system that tolerates injustice against African Americans and other marginalized groups cannot be sustained and is doomed to collapse.

Names like Michael Brown, Amaud Arbery, Trayvon Martin, Eric Garner, Breonna Taylor, Tamir Rice and George Floyd evoke great emotion among people of all races who have been personally and profoundly impacted by their unnecessary deaths. These young men and women, and others like them, are, regrettably, symbols of failings in our society that have led to the disproportionate number of deaths among African Americans over the past 10 years.

Years of oppression compounded by the economic and emotional stressors of a deadly pandemic and the abuse of power we saw most recently in Minneapolis have created a perfect storm. Disgust and disillusionment have given birth to anger, frustration and, unfortunately, violence.

We attempt to teach our students the value of peaceful protests and how to exercise their freedom of speech to point out injustices and, hopefully, bring about change. We also teach them that no matter the cause, there is no place in society for violence—it is a means with no end.

While we rage against the many ways in which targeted groups of people are persistently held down in our society—either by a knee or by inequities that have persisted over time—we must do so peacefully and with purpose. For in that lies the true power to make change.

“We are all in this together” is a phrase that has come from the pandemic and holds true as we navigate these latest challenges. Despite the actions of some, I urge us

all to respect the law enforcement officers who live by “protect and serve” and go to work every day to defend our freedoms and our safety.

Over the past few days, I have been reliving the first weeks of the school year, which followed a particularly violent summer. Our Board of Education hosted a community forum to consider how to combat the senseless deaths of young people in our region. We knew then that it was important to let our voices be heard, and it is still important today. We must work together to bring the change our community needs and deserves.

I must be completely candid with you. I am afraid that some see this as a moment and not a movement. This must be a movement that brings about sacrifice for some and change for the most marginalized persons in our community and society. The systems that underlie our society must change, really change, and we must change with them.

As an organization, the Saint Louis Public School District is committed to providing quality opportunities for all students. We commit and seek your support, as we:

- Channel today’s passion into working with the community for long-term solutions.
- Recognize and respect every individual’s personal concerns and challenges
- Double our efforts to ensure fairness and equity throughout our system.
- Advocate for changes in laws that will lift or lighten burdens of inequities for our students.
- Engage our local and state government officials in meaningful conversations on ways we can make it easier for families to not just survive in our great community—but to thrive.

Our principals, teachers, and support staff—the ones on the frontlines for our families every day—stand ready to do this work. We hope you will be our partners in this effort.

Dr. Kelvin R. Adams
Superintendent of Schools
Saint Louis Public Schools