

Dear Manchester Public Schools Community,

In the past few days, I have spoken to many staff, students and community members so I know that many members of our school community have been deeply impacted by the recent killings of and violence directed at unarmed men of color in our country. And while these things have all occurred outside of school systems, it's not as though the education system both across the country and at home didn't and doesn't contribute to these tragic injustices.

Over the past several years we have worked hard in the Manchester Public Schools to address disparities in achievement and student discipline across races. We know that there is a gap in achievement between students of color, students with disabilities, students eligible for free or reduced lunch and English Learners and their peers. We know that those students are also disciplined more frequently. The Equity Informed School Climate Assessment articulated, both quantitatively and qualitatively, the experiences of traditionally marginalized groups and outlined steps we should take which we are currently working on, to make all students feel welcomed, accepted and supported.

The recent events across the country serve as a reminder that this work is critical, urgent, and nowhere near done. As the leader of the school system, I feel compelled to say something because I understand the deep and lasting impact these events have on our entire community. That said, if I am being entirely honest, in times like these I'm never exactly sure what to say.

To our students, families, and staff of color, I want to say that I understand that the recent and continuing violence against men of color has a deep impact on you. I stand with you and all those who are troubled and traumatized by these recurring events. I want you to know that we are working, as a school system, to do our part to put an end to this, but I also know that change is not happening fast enough.

To our white students, families and staff, I want to say that we have a responsibility to take action in support of our fellow school community members of color. We have a responsibility to talk to our white friends and children about race and its impact on what is happening, why it is wrong, and what our role is in changing it. We have a responsibility to stand shoulder to shoulder with those directly impacted by this violence. It is not enough to know that racism and discrimination are wrong. We must actively move to support those experiencing harm and put an end to it.

As a parent, I know that parents of color at some point have conversations with their children about the dangers they will face in the world simply because of their skin color. As white parents of four young white children, those are conversations my wife and I will never have to have. That does not mean we should not be having conversations about race in our house because when we remain silent about racism, kids get the message that things are fine, that all people are equal, and that we don't see color. Instead we need to talk to our kids about racism and let them see us standing up against injustice so that they know it is their responsibility to do the same.

It is all of our responsibility to remind young people how quickly discriminatory and biased thoughts become hateful and racist language, and how fast that hateful and racist language becomes aggressive and violent actions. It is all of our responsibility to work to make the world a place where these kinds of things don't happen. As we seek to reinvent schools coming out of the pandemic, we must keep our focus on creating a more just and equitable school system where everyone can learn and grow without fear and with the support they need. In the next few days we will communicate opportunities for students and staff

to process these events together virtually. In the meantime, if there is any way we can support students or staff who are struggling as a result of these incidents, please let me know.

I woke up this morning to a text from Calvin Terrell, an activist and presenter who has educated and inspired students and staff in Manchester Public Schools many times over the past 15 years. Calvin's text was long but ended with "Pray for healing." So that's where I'm going to start. I'm going to pray for healing. I'm going to stand for justice. I'm going to take action to create change in our schools and community. I hope you will too.

Stay safe and well.

Sincerely,

Matt Geary