

June 8, 2020

In the midst of celebrating the graduation of our Richland School District Two seniors, the Richland Two family is grieving for yet another Black life lost at the hands of police brutality. Mr. George Floyd is just the last name in a long list of names of Black men and women who are the victims of police brutality and social injustice. While we grieve, we are hurt, sad, angry and sometimes just overwhelmed with a myriad of emotions that threaten to overtake us.

As a learning institution, we don't have the luxury of remaining in a quagmire of silence and inaction. To be true to our core values, we have to call out injustice and take steps towards positive changes. As we strive to be premier, we must not let fear overrule our responsibility to instill positive character traits in our students. As educators, we know that students learn more from what we do (or don't do) than from what we tell them. To implement, with fidelity, our Equity Policy, we must be willing to stand for what is right, acknowledge where work needs to be done and be about the business of making education equitable in every program, every school and every classroom.

To our students, our parents, our staff and our community, we acknowledge that Black lives matter. We acknowledge that hundreds of years of abduction, enslavement, segregation, discrimination, stereotyping and mistreatment simply based on the dark color of a person's skin have created generational trauma. We acknowledge that racism has been and still is alive and is used in our community and our nation. Frederick Douglas said, "Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will." We acknowledge that the peaceful protests following Mr. Floyd's death are demands against social injustice; demands for the end to police brutality; and demands for acknowledgment that Black lives matter.

At the same time, we must also acknowledge that it is inherently unfair to judge everyone with a broad brush and declare that all police departments, all law enforcement officials or all White people are bad or are racist.

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So, what will we do and what will we say to be a role model for our students to let them know that Learning, Character, Community and Joy are our real core values and that they apply to everyone? How will we use this opportunity to help fulfill our mission to, in partnership with our community, develop global citizens of tomorrow — citizens who are prepared to lead and excel in their chosen pathways? Richland Two pledges to review our policies, procedures, practices and systems to determine where there are barriers to equity and to change those things we find that negatively impact all students from reaching their highest potential. We will move forward with drafting an anti-racism policy to make plain our commitment against racist actions, practices and procedures. We will increase training and professional development of all our staff and for our students in diversity and inclusion matters such as biases and privilege because we believe that when we know better we will do better. We will teach our students how to think critically about civic matters and how to use their voices to effectuate change. We will provide opportunities for our community to participate in discussions of matters that impact us all so that the hopes and dreams of the community for our students can inform our efforts to prepare them for their chosen pathways.

Our Superintendent, Dr. Baron R. Davis, declared the 2019 - 2020 school year to be a year of vision and clarity leading to preparation for new purposes. To many, the COVID-19 pandemic and now the civic unrest resulting from another Black person's death at the hands of law enforcement has provided just about everything except clarity. However, I challenge you to look at this time from a new perspective. Injustices that were present but hidden or, even worse, were there and we refused to see them, are now out in the open for the world to see. We clearly see the need for change. Dr. Davis has reminded us that, as a Richland Two family, we also know that faith gives us the courage to conquer all fears and hope lets us see our current circumstances as the beginning of change. Join us as we prepare for change and new purposes. Renew your commitment to support each student to his or her highest potential and to accept nothing less than the best. Through sustained hard work, we will reclaim our joy and we will be premier.

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