

Sunday, May 31, 2020

Dear Colleagues,

Although this week's memo is relatively light on procedural matters, it arrives at a time that feels anything but light. Given what has occurred in the wake of George Floyd's murder, I have put all of this week's procedural information in the attached pdf so that I can focus the body of this email on the weightier subject at hand.

As we have learned from our work on equity and inclusion, we can only speak from the I perspective, so I will do so for a moment. I do not know what the days ahead will bring. I do not know how our national, state, and city leaders will respond to what each day brings, but I am not filled with optimism. I do know, however, that many people this weekend have behaved in destructive, troublingly violent ways. At the same time, I also know that many other people protested peacefully and that they were expressing outrage, pain, and grief that stems from hundreds of years of injustice in our country. The deaths of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, and Breonna Taylor are just the most recent instances of crimes that have been committed against African Americans throughout our history, over and over again. I do not know what it feels like to be the victim of such crimes, or to worry on a daily basis that I or the people whom I love could become such a victim. I can only imagine that such worry generates powerful emotions, and that those emotions are a heavy burden to carry.

As we go through the last days of this incredibly difficult school year, we will need to help each other with our burdens. Our students, and particularly our African American students, may be scared, or anxious, or in pain. We need to be ready to help them as best we can and to listen to them if they wish to be heard. Our colleagues, and particularly our African American colleagues, may be weary, or outraged, or in pain. We need to support them and offer them whatever help they may need. Living up to our Mission Statement and our Civility Pledge has never been more important. Although the words in these statements may seem overfamiliar by now, the underlying values that they express—compassion, empathy, respect, community—must guide all of our actions in the days ahead, this week and through the conclusion of the year. Now is the time for us to work as a united, supportive, and inclusive community.

By now you have likely seen Rich's email to our community. As he announced, we will host some discussions for students on Tuesday and will devote some time in history classes on Wednesday and Thursday to learning more about recent national events. We are still working on finalizing those plans and are trying to strike a balance between responding promptly to the situation and ensuring that our offerings will be thoughtful and helpful. When we have more definitive information to share about them, we will.

Finally, I ask you to look at the attached artwork created by sophomore Noel Washington. Sara Ritz asked her Sculpture and Design class to consider the power of words and to build a personal mantra for themselves and, potentially, the greater community. Noel made this piece out of materials that she found in her basement. When Sara shared images of this piece with some of us, she did so in four screen shots. Mary Fraser then found a way to make a collage out of those screen shots, and Noel has given me permission to share this collage, which she approves of, with you. Please be sure to read the entire square of text, as she notes at the end that she is both a proud American and the descendant of a long

line of African American police officers. Her work reveals to us how one of our students is feeling right now. It also reminds us that we are all Americans. In the days ahead, please remember that—we are *all* Americans—as we work together, support our students and each other, and make our school the best community that it can be during this crisis.

Best wishes,  
Mike

Michael Torrey  
Interim Head of Upper School