

Dear GIPS community:

I am grateful to the many staff members and friends in our city who have reached out to me during the last couple of weeks as our country grapples with the horrific death of George Floyd and far too many others. It means a lot to me that my school community recognizes that I am not only the superintendent of schools, I am also a black woman and the mother of two black men, as well as the leader of a diverse school district with students of every color.

I have spent these past weeks reflecting and processing my own emotions. When the video of Mr. Floyd lying under the knee of a police officer went viral, all I could see were my sons, my brother and my students in his pleading, terrified face. I shut my phone off, but I couldn't shut off the reality that he is not the first black man to die unjustly and I am daunted knowing it will take a monumental movement for him to be the last. The weight of this moment in our country's history is so very heavy, which is why it's important I write to you. I recognize we must "lift as we lead."

But not all discrimination is as blatant as a police officer's knee on a man's neck. Infractions of implicit and unconscious bias are often undetected, overlooked or dismissed. Our greatest hope to heal the wounds of systemic racism is finding the courage to convey the truth about our individual experiences - the good and the bad. We can do the work to understand and accept that none of us is perfect and all of us have hindered or hurt others without intending to and without realizing it. By taking the steps to embrace the differences in others, we can inspire change for our students and for each other. This is how we heal.

Our entire nation is hurting and, no matter your race, the pain, confusion and unrest binds us all together.



As a diverse school community, we must lift higher our commitment to racial equity; lift higher our understanding of race and bias; and lift higher our students by giving them knowledge, education and a voice. As former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said this week: “I’ve ... always believed that education is our most important intervention against the scourge of inequality.”

Our mission statement is “Every Student, Every Day, A Success.” We can only achieve our mission by considering all aspects of our students’ lives. To that end, we are taking important steps in response to this moment in history.

This past year, our staff conducted empathy interviews with students, staff and parents to better understand their daily experiences as part of an effort to develop an equity framework for the district. Based on recent events, we are taking another look at our framework and interviews to ensure we are also addressing racial injustice. We also continue our commitment to examining our own biases through staff training and discussions, as well as creating space for students to share their needs and feelings. We are advancing our strategic plan to not only ensure equity and inclusiveness for all students and families, but also to eradicate racial injustice.

The school board has told me they plan to adopt a resolution Thursday further cementing our district’s commitment to racial equity, and I stand in solidarity with them.

As the first African-American superintendent in the state of Nebraska, I have felt welcomed and supported in Grand Island because I know we are all working together to ensure all students have access to the great equalizer - education.



Students who thrive.



Without the help and support of our larger community and business partners - including the Grand Island Police Department helping us provide school resource officers - we as educators would not be able to focus on the hopes and dreams of our students every day. Just as law enforcement has helped our district navigate crises, we also recognize their critical role in the work of growing and healing our community. They are a necessary part of lifting up Grand Island's commitment to racial equity.

As a unified community, we must continue our efforts to ensure every child in Grand Island Public Schools can learn and live in a safe, healthy and accepting environment. We must continue to realize our district's vision: Students prepared to make positive contributions to society and thrive in an ever-changing world. Our community's values are strong, our beliefs are strong and our commitments are strong.

The world is calling for us to lift up our commitment to racial equity. Let's go forward, better and stronger together!

Dr. Tawana Grover

GIPS superintendent

