



March 19, 2021

Dear Team PED,

Ten months ago, we all watched in horror the brutal murder of George Floyd. Floyd's murder came on the heels of the slayings of both Ahmaud Arbery and Breonna Taylor, igniting worldwide protests and outrage that continues to simmer today. And while the mass movement sparked by these killings has produced some change, the events this week in Atlanta clearly demonstrate that the plagues of hatred and violence against racial minority groups continues in this country.

My heart goes out to all of the victims of the Atlanta killings – both those who suffered direct and unimaginable loss, and those who suffer the residual and lasting impacts of dehumanization and intolerance.

We will undoubtedly hear much more through the media about the gunman's motives and intentions in the coming days. Regardless of what we learn about the killer's intentions, we can be clear about the devastating impact his actions have had and will continue to have for Asian Americans. What is far less clear is whether or not we will choose to engage in the deep self-reflection – both as individuals and as a collective – necessary to more fully combat the divisive rhetoric and the baseless scapegoating that creates the toxically fertile soil in which race-based hatred can flourish.

Over the course of this past year, Asian Americans have been subject to an alarming increase in hate crimes, including verbal and physical assaults. As we prepare our schools to welcome back all students choosing an in-person return, I encourage us to both individually and collectively reflect on the actions we can take to create safe and inclusive spaces in our schools, and to stem the tide of racial hatred and violence in our schools and communities. For me, I will be reflecting on how I as a leader can better use the platform I have to be a more forceful advocate for the kinds of systemic changes in policy and practice that create inclusive and safe environments in schools and in communities. I will also be reflecting on how I can help create the internal systems and structures that position the PED and its employees to be active agents for anti-racism and non-violence. If you have ideas on ways I can help you, your team, or the agency be better in this regard, I enthusiastically welcome your ideas.

I know that these moments of tragedy affect all of us in different ways. Even as we remain physically apart, difficult events make it even more important that we commit to remaining supportively connected. Together, our ability to overcome and transcend the events that shake our spirits knows no bounds. The long arc of history is notorious for deviating from a path of righteousness. Collectively we can help give it a nudge back toward justice.

Sincerely,

Ryan