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"Together we Share, Discover, Create, and Achieve"

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To The Pine Grove School Community,

I write to you today after spending much time over the past week contemplating what to say to you, the members of our school community, after the horrific event that took the life of George Floyd. As the days continued, people everywhere, people whose words have great impact both locally and globally, have stepped forward. These influential citizens have shared their concerns, challenged us to speak up and act, asked us to educate ourselves, and shared their own hopes and dreams for our future. I have listened to their words and walked away thinking, "How can I make a difference?" The answer for me, lies in my role as a father and as an educator.

As a dad, there is nothing that brings me more joy or a greater sense of pride than my own children. In this role, I know my actions and words will directly impact my kids. They hear what I say but more importantly they watch what I do. When I am kind, patient, open minded, humble, and understanding, they see me modeling the traits I hope they will embody someday. When I am close minded, unaccepting, or unkind they see me at my worst. I try to be proactive and teach my children about inequity and racial discrimination as it exists. I know none of this is perfect but I have learned from others that doing or saying nothing is the worst thing I could do.

As an educator, I also know my words and actions have an impact on my students. I work to include opportunities at school for students to develop an understanding that differences are something to be celebrated and that treating others fairly and kindly, can make a big impact. I say this again, knowing that nothing I do is perfect or enough, but that doing nothing would be worse. The educator in me knows I have more to learn. I have to practice what I preach. I have to tell my students (and my own children) that I often do not know the answers. I have to share that the best way I can understand someone else's perspective is to listen to them.

I write to you today using "I, me, & my" so often in this note because I feel best qualified to speak about what I do and will continue to do as a father and educator. I will continue to talk to my own children openly, address equality proactively and when necessary reactively, and educate myself on an ongoing basis. I recognize that my actions alone will also not be enough but my hope is that I can positively impact the children I have influence over. And, who knows who they will influence someday? This is the best way (at the moment) that I know how to make a lasting difference.

Each of us chooses to handle tragedy, race, discrimination and inequality in different ways. I do not write to you today to suggest a course of action. I simply encourage you to think about the influence you have over others and most importantly, children. I believe that if we open up the lines of communication, continue to be educated on these topics, and model the best versions of ourselves, we will all be better for it. I can tell you from experience that I often walk away from my conversations with kids having learned as much as I could have ever hoped to have taught them.

I wish you and your families a happy and healthy end of the school year. Please know I am available to talk at any point, but more importantly to listen.

Warm Regards,

Jess Giannini