



Communications and Community Relations
1115 North El Paso Street, Colorado Springs, Colorado 80903

www.d11.org

(719) 520-2005

Fax: (719) 577-4546

hinesda@d11.org

Date: June 2, 2020

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Devra Ashby, 520-2286 or cell 640-2883

Colorado Springs School District 11's Superintendent's Message to the Community Regarding George Floyd Death

To Our D11 Community:

Over the past week, our country witnessed the manifestation of hundreds of years of pent up rage stemming from systemic oppression, specifically as it pertains to race. The unjust murder of George Floyd is evidence of a twisted structural normalcy that all too often goes unseen or unheard. It is hard for me to process and comprehend the repeated injustices experienced by African Americans and many communities of color in this country.

Words do not capture the magnitude of emotion I'm experiencing as a result of the killing of yet another black man in this country at the hands of police. These deplorable acts illustrate that our country merely romanticizes about the civil rights movement as if it had no value or purpose. Many want to live in a fantasy world and proclaim, "WE HAVE COME SO FAR", yet are blind to see how much further we truly need to go. As a black man in this country, I am reminded everyday about my value in society. No matter how many degrees or letters behind my name, my social value as a black man is always susceptible to question.

I remember as if it were yesterday, when I was 18 years old. I, along with two other black friends, were leaving a friend's house in Woodbury, MN. All too predictably, I was pulled over without cause. My life flashed before my eyes while two white officers asked why we were in Woodbury. They asked for ID's, ran checks on us and after seemingly hours on the side of the road being interrogated in the middle of the night, we were told to "GET OUT OF WOODBURY!" Scared, angry, confused, yet thankful, 30 years later I am alive to tell my story. I tell my story because so many other black men, like George Floyd, will never have that opportunity. Can my allies understand the mental anguish about being black in America, or is my life also just a romance to you? My heart goes out to the many black people who lost their lives senselessly.

Though I do not condone the violence propagated by outside forces, let us be reminded by the words of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. who states, "As long as America postpones justice, we stand in the position of having these recurrences of violence and riots over and over again. Social justice and progress are the absolute guarantors of riot prevention." I fully support the community exercising their rights to peacefully assemble in protest and advocating for change. They are RISING UP to speak truth about their experiences in this country. It is not exclusive to the injustices of police and the legal system; structural racism has an omnipresence in multiple industries, whether it be healthcare, education,

housing, lending...I could go on. The through line is that people of color carry the negative, inequitable outcomes of American society, while also carrying the building of this country on their backs through enslavement, yet with no attributable gain. Do you see the irony in all of this?

After talking with my parents, they both are experiencing a Déjà vu from 1968, where Minnesota was again at a racial tipping point of civil rights. Over 50 years later, as a father of two amazing daughters, I am pausing to reflect how my wife and I raised them. They've unfortunately experienced similar racial injustices in their lifetime. White students appearing in their high school with black makeup-covered faces, and videos of white students using racial epithets/graffiti to degrade students of color are just a couple of their lived experiences in school. It saddens me that I cannot tell them this will end in my lifetime, nor theirs. Rest assured, my wife and I raised two very racially and socially conscious daughters who will forever be a part of the solution. I have hope with their generation, that humanity will reign and the national conversation on race and predictable inequity will shift.

As the Superintendent of Colorado Springs School District 11, it is my moral and ethical obligation to not only ensure high quality educational experiences for our students, but also support their emotional wellbeing. We are proud of the rich diversity within our learning community and I want to assure everyone that ALL are welcomed in District 11. We have considerable work before us to eradicate the inequitable outcomes within our district often experienced by students of color, those living in conditions of poverty, students receiving special education support or acquiring English as a second language. Our school board recently passed an [Equity Policy](#), outlining our commitment to ensuring students within our district will be welcomed and supported regardless of their background or experiences they bring with them each day. Our diversity is our strength and I am confident we will remain a leader in this realm as we navigate the waters of racial injustice, we see surging in media today.

Our community can see that our [Strategic Plan](#) directly frames our core values and our mission, which is: We dare to empower the whole student to profoundly impact our world. District 11 also has the following mission impact statements:

- Each student will innovatively adapt to evolving challenges;
- Each student will actively pursue learning that continually challenges them to grow and achieve their personal best; and,
- Each student will develop personal, social, and cultural competencies and apply them intentionally in their lives.

We do not take these words lightly and expect to be held accountable for our actions as they align to the plan. Anyone can talk the talk, but it is time for all of us to walk the walk!

I live my life every day to be an example for others and hope my shoulders are strong enough and broad enough to be a lift to my daughters and any other person in our community who is destined to make a difference. I seek strength and oversight to continuously shine a light on what is right. I am thankful for my blessings and accept that I am used to convey our higher purpose in all I do. And lastly, I pray the flashpoint in my home state of Minnesota is what it will take to shift our conversation and drive permanent change, because psychologically, I too can't breathe.

Yours in solidarity,

Dr. Michael J. Thomas, Superintendent
Colorado Springs School District 11