



Pitt County Board of Education

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June 3, 2020

At Pitt County Schools, we are committed to being authentic in communications with our families. In that light, we want to be real (even if not perfect) with what we are experiencing currently as a school system.

Since March 16th, when schools were closed, we have operated as a system dedicated to serving our families, *no matter what. We've worked to serve our students academically, nutritionally, emotionally, and physically when necessary. During uncertain times, we began emerging TOGETHER with a renewed sense of solidarity and Pitt County Schools Strong.*

Solidarity means unity. It means mutual support and agreed-upon action surrounding a common cause.

Yet, the past few weeks have been an incredible challenge to the *solidarity we have gained as a system of students, families and staff members unified to do our best to serve the children of Pitt County. Here is just part of what we have witnessed around the nation and in our community that has broken our hearts for PCS and our community:*

-The senseless deaths of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, George Floyd and others gave rise to civil unrest. *Our families are reeling.*

-Staff members are having to explain to their students and to their own children terms like *systemic racism, asphyxiation and racial profiling. Our employees are not OK.*

-Students have watched as dehumanizing comments and divisive attitudes have littered social media accounts. *Our children are under attack from all sides (including each other).*

-Our community is dealing with incredible conflict while navigating pandemic-related restrictions and facing an uncertain economy. *Our partners and neighbors are struggling.*

To be clear, as a school system, we stand in solidarity against discrimination, cultural biases and racism. Derogatory statements made by any student or staff member do not represent who we are as a school system, nor are these sentiments a part of our core values.

Because it is a shared community responsibility to care for our children, it is our hope and our plea that we can now come together to begin to recover and to heal from our current state of unrest and racial divide. Yet, recovering and healing is not enough. Statements without action are not sufficient, and acting alone is not an option.

While academics is a top priority as a school system, we know that learning is difficult at best when a student or staff member feels hungry, demoralized, overwhelmed or unsafe. These basic needs must be met before we can teach our students.

Therefore, one of the key focus components of our upcoming strategic plan (2020-2025) is *EQUITY*. Also, one of the key character traits we must work harder to instill in every PCS learner is *EMPATHY*. While our complete strategic plan and *Portrait of a PCS Learner* has yet to be fully revealed to the public (and yes, put temporarily on hold due to COVID-19), we can confidently say we are committed to continue to fight for *equity* and *empathy* for all students as we move forward as a system.

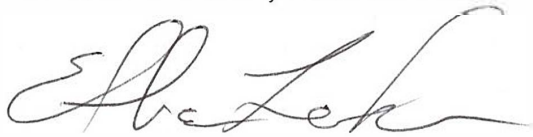
Given our current reality, we can see that such a commitment has never been more appropriate or more challenging.

Pitt County, we can't accomplish this alone. Please join us in breaking down barriers, dismantling racism, providing outlets to listen to and hear each other and rebuilding unity and *solidarity* together. Our system is strong, our community is strong, and our children are looking to us to be stronger, as leaders, now more than ever.

Sincerely,



Betsy Flanagan
Chair, The Pitt County Board of Education



Dr. Ethan Lenker
Superintendent, Pitt County Schools

Want to Take Action Now?

Here are a few resources (though certainly not an exhaustive list):

Turn to your children and talk to them about *equity* and *empathy*, and pledge with us to work on becoming better at both. With younger students, try opening the dialogue with this online reading of a wonderful book, [*I Am Human*](#), or ask for a suggestion from your school's media coordinator.

Need a resource to talk to your older children or teens about violence or fear? Try [this resource](#) from the National School Psychologists Association, whose mission is, *Helping Children Thrive in School, at Home, and in Life*.

Is your student in need of counseling? Please reach out to your school's counselor(s), social workers or school psychologists, or utilize [211.org](#) or Integrated Family Services (www.integratedfamilyservices.net) who host a CRISIS chat line and provide mobile crisis assistance at 1-866-437-1821.

If you are looking for immediate resources to teach your children about digital responsibility in a social media-ruled world, try parent resources like this from [Common Sense Media](#), a platform used often by our school media coordinators and educators.

Finally, if you are seeking resources to understand tolerance, racial or other inequities, try this resource from [Tolerance.org](#). Or ask your child's teacher, your own neighbors and fellow community members, for other resources or their own personal stories.