

## Superintendent's Message to our School Community

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June 2, 2020

Dear LPS Staff and Families,

The most recent events surrounding the tragic death of George Floyd and the increasing number of deaths of Black men at the hands of law enforcement continue to shed light on the consequences of social injustice and systemic racism that permeate the societal fabric of our nation. As a Black man, the father of two Black boys, and as the Superintendent of more than 350 other Black boys, this is personal. Walking alongside some of our scholars during the recent Downtown Lawrence protest march and seeing the hurt, concern, and uncertainty on their faces saddened me. They deserve better.

I am reminded that we still have much work to do in creating more inclusive environments for our scholars, families, staff, community, nation, and our world. As a school system, we must ensure we are doing our part to continue to foster empathy and kindness. Our schools must be diverse spaces where our scholars can learn acceptance and belonging.

We continue our daily work on our promise to ensure that students of all races, backgrounds, and abilities achieve at high levels, demonstrate proficiency in reading by the third grade and in math by the eighth grade, and graduate on time prepared for success in college and careers. In this promise that guides our community's plan for school progress, all means all!

Our district's racial equity journey began nearly 15 years ago with a book study of *Courageous Conversations about Race: A Field Guide for Achieving Equity in Schools* by Glenn Singleton. We expect all staff to participate in the training "Beyond Diversity: Introduction to Courageous Conversations and a Foundation for Deinstitutionalizing Racism and Eliminating Racial Achievement Disparities." Our educators participate in culturally relevant teaching training. Each of our schools has an Equity Leadership Team. We evaluate curriculum and other educational resources with a culturally relevant rubric. We engage students in discussions about race and involve our Equity Advisory Council and Parents of Color advisory groups in decision making. Visit [www.usd497.org/equity](http://www.usd497.org/equity) to read more about our district's equity journey.

We also partner with the Midwest and Plains Equity Assistance Center. It provides technical assistance and training to public school districts to promote equitable educational opportunities and work in the areas of civil rights, equity, and school reform. While Lawrence Public Schools has made a tremendous amount of progress, we know that there is much more work to be done. To bring about change and disrupt systemic racism and systems of oppression, it is up to each of us to commit to act individually, and dedicate ourselves to working together collectively, to continue these conversations in our classrooms, homes, and community.

Lawrence Board of Education Policy prohibits discrimination against any individual on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, age, national origin, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression. The school board has been working to finalize an Equity Policy that will continue to move our equity work forward. We must ensure that everyone in our school community has the opportunity to learn and work in an environment free from discrimination and harassment, an environment where each individual is treated with dignity and respect.

We must continue our work to ensure that we reach our aspirations of closing opportunity and achievement gaps for our students of color and other marginalized groups. We celebrate our diversity and will provide the necessary resources and supports to eliminate barriers and disproportionalities so all scholars leave us with the knowledge and skills necessary to become contributing citizens in our diverse society. We want our scholars to become change agents who will work to end systemic racism. This is our legacy work.

This urgent work starts with each of us. Lawrence can lead the way if each of us commits to examine personal bias, speak out against social injustices, and stand up for and learn from others who do not look like us. We must continue to eliminate behaviors, policies, practices, and procedures that perpetuate systemic racism.

Black Lives Matter. Our Black scholars, school families, and staff matter. We see you, hear you, and support you. We will continue to champion all students as one team.

Sincerely,

Anthony Lewis, Ph.D.

Superintendent