



Dr. A. Katrise Perera, Superintendent

Gresham-Barlow School District No. 10Jt

1331 NW Eastman Parkway, Gresham, OR 97030-3825
www.gresham.k12.or.us

Phone: (503) 261-4555
Fax: (503) 261-4554

May 31, 2020

Greetings TEAM GBSD -

Like you, I am emotionally tired from the rising and devastating impact of COVID19 on American lives for the last few weeks. I was emotionally horrified by the images of senseless brutality that has repeatedly led to the loss of lives this week. I was emotionally annoyed and unnerved by the wrongful accusations and the ability to leverage privilege by an individual not following the rules this past weekend. I was emotionally discouraged by the civil unrest of violent rioters pretending to be protesters in the last 24-hours.

Like you, I am afraid that many may not understand the response of the protesters, and may confuse the rioters' actions with the ultimate goals of the protesters. I am afraid that there are many attending the protest with a goal being to only disrupt and cause havoc by looting and destructive behavior.

Like you, I am frustrated with the complicity shown by those charged with protecting and serving but rather - who stood idle while another human had every breath squeezed out of him. I am frustrated with the silence of many in positions of leadership. I am frustrated that many are asking for leadership and acknowledgment from the US executive branch to no avail. To be honest, I would prefer that the executive branch extend some level of empathy or hope - and that we step up to allow the leader within each of us to guide our steps forward.

Like you, I am in pain. I am in pain from a frequent thought that Ahmaud Arbery (Georgia), Breonna Taylor (Kentucky), George Floyd (Minnesota) could have been one of my brothers, my sister, a nephew, an uncle, an aunt, my husband, one of my daughters, any other relative, or even me. I grew up in the deep-South and I have lost relatives to similar senseless situations, which I am reminded of with each tragic event.

Yet, as the superintendent, I feel the pressure to "staying strong and having all" the answers. I feel the pressure to take-action and to speak out. I feel obligated to help others understand the impact of such events and to bring comfort to those in need of understanding. The reality is - I am not sure of what I can do that will immediately bring comfort to those in pain. I do not know what actions would be best for each individual. I do not have all the answers, but I am willing to help find them and to seek resources that will assist.

What I do know is that it will take more than my words and more than just my actions. What I know is that it will take more than just the answers that I may have or the resources that I can provide. What I know is that there are abject systems of discrimination that exist in every public entity of society. What I know is that as K12educators - we are not immune. Plainly put - we as K12 educators have a moral obligation to dismantle those discriminatory policies, practices, and protocols within our own system.

As K12 educators, we have an obligation to persuade our brothers, sisters, colleagues, and community leaders that they have a responsibility to help you dismantle discriminatory systems. We have an ongoing obligation to encourage one another to rebuild trust with culturally specific communities.

We can begin this by reviewing the policies that govern our district and statewide legislation that causes undue-burdens upon historically underserved populations. We can intentionally listen to learn - instead of falling back on our own fragility. WE can educate ourselves on being culturally responsive educators and encourage others to do the same. We can no longer depend solely upon specific cultures to teach us what we need to know about their culture and social/political status that will benefit our students. It is important to learn. It is important to learn daily from one another so that we can continuously improve and better serve our students.

I am not better than you and I have more things to learn.

You are not better than me and you have more things to learn.

What I believe is that - we are better together and WE CAN DO BETTER for each of our GBSD students.

As always, thank you for all that you do for our students.

Have a great week.

Yours in education,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dr. A. Katrise Perera". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "D" and "K".

Dr. A. Katrise Perera
Superintendent