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President, Lower Merion Board of School Directors
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We would like to start meeting with a moment of silence in memory of the premature deaths due to white supremacy of George Floyd, Tony McDade, Breonna Taylor, Trayvon Martin, Tamir Rice, Michael Brown, Eric Garner, Philando Castile, Ahmaud Arbery, Sandra Bland and numerous others whose names are known or not known to many.

On behalf of the Board of School Directors of the Lower Merion School District, I want everyone to know that we stand with our youth and other community members to demand an anti-racist agenda be pursued and to declare that Black Lives Matter. We need to eradicate white supremacy and heteropatriarchy in all of our institutions, but especially our schools, which is where we have the most power to effect change. This is and will continue to be the goal of this Board, but we need to do better.

As a result of the horrifying murder of George Floyd, the racist response of elected officials from the White House to the County Court House and even in our own buildings, we are proud to see our students at the forefront of demands to end racism and ensure that Black Lives Matter. Yesterday at Vernon Young Memorial Park and Arnold Field, we heard our young people share their trauma. Our youth said that they don't feel safe walking our streets. They said that they don't feel heard or represented in our schools. This is NOT acceptable. This Must End. We hear you and we want to hear more from you. We are committed to hearing your stories and listening to your voices as we redouble our efforts to pursue an anti-racist agenda in our schools and our wider community.

We hired Superintendent Robert Copeland five years ago because of his expertise, commitment, and experience in implementing anti-racist educational policies and practices. Under his guidance, we now look at every decision—policy, budget, curriculum, professional development, hiring—through an equity lens. This is incredibly important. Let me give you a few examples.

Superintendent Copeland had grave concerns about black and brown students experiencing disproportionality in discipline. He made it a priority to eliminate the disproportionality in how discipline is meted out by incorporating a focus on restorative justice practices in our schools as a main pillar of the Achievement Imperative Task Force –the action arm of the Committee on Race in Education or CARE.

After the tragic school shooting in Parkland, Florida, Superintendent Copeland created a task force to examine how we should increase security in our schools. Unlike many other districts, we increased security without having armed police officers in our schools every day.

We followed this approach because we did not want to replicate US society's over-policing of black and brown students within our buildings.

After yesterday's march, a student approached me about her concerns with our Police liaison program in which officers come to each of our schools to meet students. We are certainly willing to listen to the concerns of students who wish us to reconsider the program.

We also are reevaluating and changing the curriculum, professional development, and hiring practices through an equity lens in order to eliminate white supremacy in our schools.

And this Board will not redistrict on the back of the Ardmore community. If you don't know what I'm talking about you should look at how every redistricting and school closing in this community going back over 50 years fell on the African-American community. It will never happen with this Board.

This Board has been vocally supporting equal funding across the Commonwealth because the way schools are funded perpetuates white supremacy and racism.

Our youth are our leaders. We need to listen to you and we need to do better. We stand united with you and are humbled to work with you—our young people—to dismantle white supremacy and ensure Black Lives Matter. Please continue to protest and please join us at our meetings, write to us at community comments, ensure your new representative agrees with your point of view, hold us accountable and continue to use your voices to change our schools and our community.