June 1, 2020

Dear BCCS Community,

We write to you this morning, at the beginning of a week of celebration for graduates, with the heaviest of hearts. We are hunkered down in our homes. And yet, the death of George Floyd feels very, very close to our community. We have been thinking and talking about the national events all week. Many students shared their grief in classes last week with their teachers. Our staff talked about it in our meetings on Wednesday and Friday, and we have been struggling with what to say to the whole school community that wouldn’t feel trite. We also wanted to be sure that we had some action steps to share. To that end, know that in each part of the school, we’re developing Restorative Circles for students to share their feelings to launch this week. We are also offering counseling support for students who need it, now and in the future. School-wide, we have a Diversity Equity and Inclusion Task Force that meets monthly to measure the school’s success against our commitments. And we’ve hired a full time Diversity, Equity and Inclusion coordinator to help advance the school’s work. There’s still a lot to do, but we’re moving.

And yet, we appreciate the high school student who wrote to us on Saturday night to share her frustration with our lack of public statement: *As much as our school claims they care for the Black Lives Matter movement and for black students themselves, we all see in the news what’s going on. Black students see what’s going on, and it’s taking a strain on our mental health, with all said your students and young black boys and girls feel as though their lives do not matter, yet there still hasn’t been a statement released by the school to support your black students.*

She closed by noting, “If you are neutral in situations of injustice you have chosen the side of the oppressor”-Desmond Tutu.

We can understand this sentiment. With the magnitude of the national events, it is fair, students, to expect to hear from your school. So know this: we passionately and unequivocally support you. We need to be clear and bold in support of and advocacy for your right to walk down the street or watch birds in a park without fearing that someone will hurt you out of fear of your skin color. George Floyd did nothing, nothing, to deserve death. And Christian Cooper did nothing to warrant police being called on him while he took a simple walk in Central Park. Ahmaud Arbery in Georgia and Breonna Taylor in Kentucky, both victims of violence connected to the color of their skin, did not deserve to die, either. All human beings deserve the right to feel safe in their own communities or homes. The grief of death at the hands of racially charged violence is all the more painful in the context of disproportionate COVID-19 deaths affecting communities...
of color. On top of that, in the last several weeks, there has been violence in our own streets of Boston-- with young people finding themselves at the center, further traumatizing our young people of color who are watching violence unfold with their friends and neighbors. It is too much.

Oh, BCCS. We’re a diverse community. Not just racially, but politically and ideologically. Every time we send one of these emails, we steel ourselves for the responses from those who see things differently. Some see a stance of support for Black Lives as an indictment on our police and first responders in Boston. It’s not. Families of first responders, we see you, too, and we know that you are a diverse group in and of yourselves. We see your sacrifice, now more than ever as some of us have the luxury of staying home while you do not. We know you put yourselves on the front lines daily and that you face violence as you work to keep Boston’s streets safe. We were horrified to see, as recently as last night, that you were attacked just as you worked to protect our citizens’ rights to protest. We are grateful for your deep and abiding commitment to service and for the many BCCS families who have helped us understand your perspective. But no sacrifice should silence the much needed shout of solidarity for our students of color who need to believe that their school sees them for their humanity.

At BCCS, one of our core values is Belonging. To belong, you need to be and feel known. To be and feel known, you must be seen for more than your skin color, and you must be lifted up when so much of our world is designed to push you down. This is the ultimate struggle of BCCS, a school for all of Boston. And it is a worthy journey we will take together.

Make safe choices, BCCS. We love you. All of you.

Yours,

Lenny Bautista, Rodney Coleman, Nadiya Monestime, Sarah Morland, Megan Noyes, Courtney Smith, and Shannah Varón