

Open Letter to District 196 Superintendent Mary Kreger

Ms. Kreger and fellow coworkers,

We take our positions as educators seriously. We are held to a higher standard because we are entrusted with the minds and hearts of children in our community. We walk the delicate balance of coming alongside parents, grandparents and guardians to offer the numerous supportive resources that our district provides. With open arms, we serve families from many different ethnicities, cultures and faiths. We've yet to work with anyone in this district who does not deeply care about all children, regardless of the color of their skin, and we can think of nothing more hurtful than to be accused of something as despicable as favoring one child over another because of their ethnicity. We all bring unique perspectives and experiences to the table. We see the world through different lenses, which provides great insight into various situations.

The past year and a half has been full of emotions, fears and unknowns. We have felt them as adults and have had to rise above those fears to be able to continue teaching our students in a safe environment. As employees of District 196, we are also individuals who experience events through different lenses. Some of us have been touched by tragedy and trauma. Some of us have family, children, or spouses in law enforcement. Some of us have been victims whose lives have literally been saved by someone who wore a badge. Some of us have flags in our home that were draped over the casket of a loved one who gave their life for this country. Those experiences change us and many of them have risen to the surface the past year and a half. Just as we respect the families we serve, we too ask that of you, Ms. Kreger. To assume that we all vote the same way or hold the same perspective or view experiences in the past year and a half through the same lens would be ignorant and divisive.

As educators, we have an incredible opportunity to demonstrate resilience and unity in our community and with the students in our care. We owe it to our students to teach them how to have a respectful debate and how to move forward without complete consensus. In order to do that, we cannot allow any single perspective to cause division amongst us. We ALL agree that every single ethnicity, culture and faith in our classrooms should be provided the same opportunity to learn and grow. Please remember, we agree on this! It is also possible that some of us have different perspectives on how to teach those things. That doesn't make us enemies. Likewise, we shouldn't be surprised or angered when a coworker (or anyone for that matter) has a different perspective on how best to teach history or current events.

Currently, there is great division in our district and the community that we serve. This division started from the top down, Ms. Kreger. For you to request the support of as many staff members as possible to support your political agenda and actively oppose those in the community who are attempting to voice their concerns is unprofessional and shows strong bias, with complete disregard for the members of the community we are supposed to serve. To send emails that dictate a political perspective that all staff of the entire district are expected to adhere to is inappropriate and divisive.

Before we lose our audience, we would like to say that we believe there is much more that unites us than divides us in our vision for the community and our country. We work side by side every single day and we are an amazing team! Some of us oppose Critical Race Theory. That's NOT because we are racist in any way, but because we firmly believe that this approach teaches division instead of diversity and

separates instead of unifies. We believe that while our nation was hurt by a horrendous tragedy last year, teaching our students to hate all law enforcement is a gross overreaction and is not an opinion that is appropriate for the schools to teach if we want to continue to progress as a civilized society. Don't buy into the lie that if someone disagrees with your approach, or has a different perspective, that they are racist or worthy of losing their job, or should be publicly canceled. This country was founded on healthy debate. We'll never come together and learn from one another by trying to silence anyone with differing views. That's not how we teach mutual respect and healthy disagreements to our students. Please hear our hearts, that we believe that we DO share the same end goal but we have a difference of opinion on the best way to get there. We love our students just as much as you do. This is a complicated and sensitive issue. We are not asking to be validated or celebrated. We are simply asking for respectful debate that requires both sides to listen with the intent to learn and understand and not with the intent to defame, discredit or cancel.

We are asking that you don't retaliate or cancel us and further divide this district. We as educators have an amazing opportunity to show our students how to work together to address differing perspectives on significant issues, while still having mutual respect and devotion to our profession and our school community. We can create amazing resilience by teaching all our students that they can accomplish anything they put their mind to. We can create unity by reminding them that they are a part of a school family that is dedicated to learning and growing and respecting people with different ethnicities, cultures, faiths and values, but we must be willing to do that with each other.

Ms. Kreger, this needs to start with you. Please remember that you are leading us as educators and your job is not to show a political bias but to create unity amongst staff, families and students in our classrooms. We have to do better. We can do better. Our children are watching.