June 3, 2020

Dear TAF Community,

Since the events of the past week unfolded, I, like many other Black Americans, received numerous emails from friends and professional colleagues checking in to see if I’m OK. I suspect for the first time they understood what we as Black Americans have known since the day we were born — our lives have less value in America. We are tired, angry, and confused. More importantly, we are experiencing excruciating emotional pain. Although we will navigate this space that is familiar to us because we have to, it's important that you know I am NOT OK, we are NOT OK, and our children are NOT OK.

At TAF, one of our most basic struggles is to create safe academic spaces, where Black students and teachers’ lived and inherited experiences are seen, valued, and heard. We know the only way for students to learn without limits is to break down systemic oppression while simultaneously arming them with the 21st-century skills needed to create the world they envision and empower community activism and leadership for change. This is our fight, manifested through our multicultural classrooms, culturally relevant project-based lessons, and teacher development. We work hard every single day to ensure our students leave TAF classrooms socially conscious and self-aware.

To be honest, some days that doesn’t seem like enough to prepare them for a country where every institution is held up by the load-bearing walls of racism.

During a class session yesterday, one of our Black 6th-grade students said, “People have no idea what it's like being in my skin. Why do I have to be afraid to go for a run in my neighborhood with a hoodie on and why am I fearful when I see the police?”

We could teach him what we’ve been trained to do to survive — compartmentalize to get through the day to avoid suspension, or when he gets older, refrain from speaking up about mistreatment and double-standards to keep his job. We could tell him to always comply if he’s stopped by the authorities, although we know he could end up in harm's way regardless. We could tell him there are only pockets of injustice, so all he needs to do is learn how to avoid them, but then we’d be lying.
This current outcry is the result of years of oppression, willful ignorance, hate, and racism. Our position at TAF is to continue dedicating our lives to ensure this young Black boy’s generation and those after can have a chance of living in a truly equitable society where people see both our students’ genius and skin color and value them all as equal human beings. It is only then that America will be better.

Our teachers and administrators are already on a racial equity journey— a process with no conceivable end. This work is critical so we are prepared to help our students make sense of the trauma they are enduring through a healing-centered approach.

**We are striving to be individually and collectively anti-racist.** This is TAF’s journey to justice. To our allies, we ask you to push through any discomfort you may feel on your own personal journey and join us in this important work. Education should be a place where everyone wins. America should be a place where everyone wins. This won’t happen without consistent support and advocacy, and it won’t happen without you.

Trish Millines Dziko  
Co-founder and Executive Director, TAF