Cheltenham School Board Denounces Montgomery County Commissioner Joseph Gale’s Statement on Philadelphia Protests

You can either lead to find solutions to difficult issues, stand by in silence or speak out and take a stand. The Cheltenham School Board chooses to take a stand and speak out to denounce the racist and divisive June 1st statement by Montgomery County Commissioner Gale about the Philadelphia Protests. His view that the peaceful protests in Philadelphia were in fact a riot whose real intention was to provide an opportunity to ravage the city, completely ignores reality and the history of racism. He fails to even mention Mr. Floyd’s death, but rather focuses on the looter’s actions. His views do not reflect what our School District teaches our students, reflect the views of our Board or our wonderfully diverse community.

On May 25, 2020, George Floyd was killed by the callous actions of four police officers. In just 8 minutes and 46 seconds, his life was ended, not by a gun, but by the knee of an individual who did not believe that his life mattered. This is just the latest of other senseless murders of African Americans including Breonna Taylor, Philando Castile, Ahmaud Arbery, and too many other innocent people. This is the unfortunate reality that faces people of color, especially young Black men who can be arrested or killed because someone feels threatened by their mere presence. In the midst of adjusting to a new normal under COVID-19, we want to be clear that the safety and security of all our students, staff and community members matter.

The Cheltenham School Board supports the peaceful protests calling for meaningful social justice reform. This is how change is sometimes made in American through difficult moments of people standing up for justice and not shrinking from difficult work in order to reach the desired outcomes. We are hopeful that these protests will prompt honest discussions that lead to sustainable policy and legislative solutions to address racism and root out systemic bias. This will only happen if we do not turn away or ignore the hurt and pain each time a life is senselessly lost.

As we move forward together, we will continue to evaluate our own policies and practices to ensure that every student gets what they need to be successful. Our community’s future success depends on our willingness, commitment and ability to effectively address inequities inherent in many organizations and prepare the next generation of leaders. We cannot let the race, gender or ability of young people determine whether they succeed or fail.

We will continue to support our local police force’s engagement of our students in the Cheltenham Police Athletic League or PAL but know that more work is needed to root out police brutality against people of color in America today. We will also challenge people to truly see the best in one another. As elected School Board members, we choose to speak out and welcome working with others who are serious about finding real solutions and condemn leaders who seek to instill division and racism.

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