

In the attached letter you will find questions and concerns regarding the following topics.

- Equity Policy Adopted May 27, 2020 by District 11.
 - o Suggestions for modifications included.
- Equity Graphic on District 11 website.
- Letters from Superintendent Dr. Michael Thomas to District 11 community.
- Resources/Websites recommended by Dr. Thomas in a letter to District 11 community.
 - o Does District 11 stand by the principles and communications presented on the Center for Racial Justice website?
- Hiring of research company American Institute for Research.
- Director of Equity and Inclusion position creation.
- Comments by Director of Equity and Inclusion Mrs. Knox-Miller during the February 9, 2021 Beyond the Mask Meeting discussion on Equity.

In an effort to support the District 11 community and students I have drafted this letter to encourage District 11 leadership to reconsider the ideological and political attitudes the school district has begun to adopt. I request that the school district focus on educating students in reading, math, science, etc. instead of spreading ideologies that are divisive. The length and breadth of my letter will show why I have come to this conclusion and is intended to be respectful while questioning. Due to the gravity and extensive spread within District 11 policies and personnel I will be informing as many in the District 11 community as I can to raise awareness of the attitudes future generations are being trained in by your institution.

Please consider this letter an effort to begin dialogue and an opportunity for the school district to hear feedback from a very concerned parent. I request District 11 to provide a response to my questions by July 23, 2021. If this date proves difficult due to summer break please provide a summary of your efforts and a date that a thorough response can be expected.

Thank you for reading the attached letter.

Sincerely,

Lauren Nelson

lauren.nelson604@gmail.com

To Colorado Springs School District 11 Leadership,

June 22, 2021

I appreciate the opportunity to express questions concerning details in the District 11 equity policy adopted May 2021. I also would like to address comments made by Superintendent Dr. Michael Thomas and Director of Equity and Inclusion Mrs. Alexis Knox-Miller in letters and meetings over the course of the past year. As a parent of two elementary age students and a former District 11 student K-12 I have a genuine interest in the wellbeing of District 11. I recognize that my interpretation of all that District 11 has presented may not be accurate so wanted to take time to share and allow District 11 an opportunity to hear how the information is being received and in turn respond.

I am very concerned about the messages District 11 is sending as revealed in these communications. It appears District 11 is diverting its focus from education in the basics such as reading, science and math but instead is educating future generations in ideological or political viewpoints. I wholeheartedly disagree with these decisions and have considered removing my children from District 11 enrollment. I believe District 11 can provide opportunities to my children that I value so I wish to keep them enrolled, hence I have chosen to write this letter begging the District to reconsider the path it is taking. I recognize District 11 may not take heed of my perspective and I will therefore be forced to either correct the doctrinal education at home after my children attend your schools or remove them from your institution. Time will tell and I will inform as many parents as I possibly can of the misguided endeavor District 11 is on.

Equity Policy – questions in this section are based on the Equity Policy Adopted May 27, 2020.

“The Board hereby finds and declares the following: ...

• The Board recognizes that students of various races and ethnicities have been disadvantaged by long-standing inequities, the causes of which are multi-faceted, and reflect historical, social, and institutional factors.”

- What are the disadvantages that various races and ethnicities are currently facing institutionally or socially? Name the facets. Historical causes cannot be undone, when will the district no longer consider them a factor?

“• The Board believes that as a diverse urban school district, a systemic approach is critical to ensure that ALL students, including marginalized groups, have equitable learning opportunities, experiences, and outcomes.”

- What does systemic approach mean? One size fits all?
- What does the District 11 Board mean by equitable outcomes?

“• The Board recognizes the impact of systemic inequities on teaching and learning, and that it is critical that all staff be adequately trained in diversity, cultural competencies, and equity.”

- What are the systemic inequities the board has recognized? Name the systems or policies.
- What type of training in diversity, cultural competencies and equity is District 11 going to pursue for its staff?

“Systemic Racism: the collective failure of a public or private organization to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their race, color, culture or ethnic origin which can be seen or detected in practices, processes, systems, attitudes and behavior. Systemic racism looks beyond individual acts of prejudice to the systemic biases that may be built into institutions. These systemic biases discriminate against and disadvantage people of color through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness or racial stereotyping.”

- Has the district identified any “systemic biases that may be built into institutions” within District 11 systems? If so, what are the systems and biases?

Bullet point C. on the Equity policy states *“C. On an ongoing basis, the District shall annually allocate its financial, capital and human resources equitably and not necessarily equally.”*

- Can you provide examples of what this would look like? I believe the district already does this to some extent such as English as a Second Language support or providing reading intervention. Is bullet point C. expressing a continuation of what is already taking place or is the District expanding the scope? If expanding, what are some examples?

Bullet point F. on the equity policy states *“F. The District shall utilize hiring practices that support and stimulate racial, gender, and language diversity in its staff by recruiting, employing, training and retaining its employees. The District is committed to increasing the recruitment and retention of a highly qualified diverse staff. The District believes it is critical that students of all races, ethnicities, backgrounds, and cultures are exposed to role models with similar backgrounds and cultures. The recruitment of a diverse workforce affords all students an opportunity of inclusiveness in the education system. Diversity in our education workforce provides all children with the opportunity to learn from others with dissimilar backgrounds and recognizes the value of diversity in all learning environments.”*

- Is the district maintaining quality as first priority regardless of the characteristics listed here?
- Is the district saying resources/funding will be focused on headhunting personnel that are considered diverse?

As written it is unclear if the district is stating that the focus will shift to targeting hiring specific “types of people”. If the intention is to target specific “types of people” at the sacrifice of potential qualified candidates I strongly challenge the district in this decision.

- **Rewording suggestion** – “The District shall hire highly qualified staff with a passion for supporting the education of future generations. The District supports racial, gender, and language diversity in its staff by recruiting, employing, training and retaining its employees. The District is committed to hiring the most qualified staff and encourages diversity in its applicants. The District believes it is critical that students of all races, ethnicities, backgrounds, and cultures are exposed to role models with similar backgrounds and cultures. The recruitment of a diverse workforce affords all students an opportunity of inclusiveness in the education system. Diversity in our education workforce provides all children with the opportunity to learn from others with dissimilar backgrounds and recognizes the value of diversity in all learning environments.

Bullet Point H. on the equity policy states *“H. The District shall engage in best business practices that model equity. For example, the District shall promote the diversification of its vendor and supplier corps, to include minority, LGBTQ, various abilities, and women-owned businesses, in accordance with law and District policy. See Board Policy DJ, Procurement and Contracting.”*

- Is the district maintaining quality as first priority regardless of the characteristics listed?

Again, if District 11 is choosing to use a business based upon the owner’s characteristics versus the merits of the business and the value provided to the district I strongly challenge this decision.

- **Rewording suggestion** - H. The District shall engage in best business practices that model equity. For example, the District welcomes the diversification of its vendor and supplier corps, to include minority, LGBTQ, various abilities, and women-owned businesses, in accordance with law and District policy. See Board Policy DJ, Procurement and Contracting.”

Bullet Point I. on the equity policy states *“I. The District shall provide teaching staff with professional development specifically designed to strengthen the employee’s knowledge and skillset for eliminating opportunity encumbrances and achievement inequities between historically marginalized students and white students.”*

- Wouldn’t the following statement achieve the goal of looking out for all students?
 - **Rewording Suggestion** - The District shall provide teaching staff with professional development specifically designed to strengthen the employee’s

knowledge and skillset for eliminating opportunity encumbrances for any students.

- Why is District 11 distinguishing “*historically marginalized students and white students*”?
The thing about history is, it doesn’t change. There will continually be historically marginalized students. At what point would this not need to be accounted for?
- What are the opportunity encumbrances that students face?

In no way am I trying to minimize our nation’s history and the tragedies that have occurred among a variety of people groups over the years. It is important to remember them and recognize the grave mistakes/poor choices that inflicted much pain on so many. I lack an understanding as to why it is important to the district to recognize it here in the equity policy. As written, bullet point I. leads to the following questions.

- Does District 11 believe achievement inequities are due to racism/biases alone?
- Does the district believe its teachers/staff are racist and this is the cause for achievement inequities?
- Does the district believe historically marginalized students are at a disadvantage? And that they will continually be at a disadvantage?
- Does the district believe a white student will not face opportunity encumbrances or struggle with achievement/success?

I recognize District 11 has identified achievement inequities among groups of people. I appreciate the districts desire to remedy any issues that may be contributing to these discrepancies and am thankful for the “take action” attitude among District 11 leadership. The purpose of my letter full of many questions is to encourage the district to not jump to conclusions, spending time, energy and funding without clear understanding of cause and effect. I highly encourage District 11 leadership to read *Discrimination and Disparities*, *Ethnic America* or *Cosmic Justice* written by Economist Thomas Sowell to gain, perhaps, a different perspective on results throughout the district. Discrepancies do not necessarily mean discrimination has occurred.

Equity graphic on District 11 website.

“Inequality – Unequal access to opportunities.

Equality – Evenly distributed tools and assistance.

Equity – Custom tools that identify and address inequality.

Justice – Fixing the system to offer equal access to both tools and opportunities.”

In order to make the most of the opportunities presented by District 11 I believe it already provides additional support to those who need it.

- In the image the apple tree has been straightened implying the system was previously skewed towards some. What are some examples of this within District 11? Is the system skewed? What is preventing the child from walking to the other side of the tree? There is no fence (policy) preventing the child to move closer to the apples.
- Is District 11 saying it wishes to change nature? On paper this may look good but is it realistic? To continue the apple tree analogy, is it possible to straighten out a tree? Is the district accounting for some aspects in life that are just the way it is? A child in a wheel chair is never going to be a fast runner, is the district expecting equal outcomes in situations such as these?
- Is the district attempting to take responsibility for factors that are outside of its scope or role? Is District 11 thinking realistically in trying to meet the needs of all? While a good natured cause but at what cost? Not only financially but it will also prove to be at the detriment of students for a cause that is ultimately impossible.

District 11 can only do so much. The district is not preventing anyone from accessing opportunities, they are open to all. Is the district accounting for individual choice and family responsibility to make the most of the opportunities provided?

Letters from Superintendent Dr. Michael Thomas to District 11 community.

I question the content of the letters sent by Dr. Michael Thomas over the past year to the District 11 community and the appropriate use of his platform in his position of Superintendent. The first letter in June of 2020 following the George Floyd death and riots was perhaps forgivable as we were all shaken by the incident and grace can be granted as he felt the necessity of sharing his thoughts and feelings. As he has continued to send letters over the last several months I must speak up in dissent. Dr. Thomas has insinuated a variety of claims regarding broader society in the United States. These claims are not based upon provided factual evidence but rather personal experience. Particularly within an academic institution this seems surprising and applying personal experience to make accusations towards society is anecdotal at best.

It is apparent from Dr. Thomas' statements that he believes his responsibilities involve sharing his own personal worldview with the District 11 community. While it is undeniable that how we view the world will shape our thoughts and actions it is altogether different to actively engage

in sharing those beliefs with others. I personally disagree with his perspective and am concerned that in his position of superintendent he is using his influence over future generations. His communication is not empowering nor teaches students how to adapt to evolving challenges as defined in District 11 mission statements.

It is tragic that many people have stories similar to Dr. Thomas's where mistreatment occurred due to the color of their skin. I recognize Dr. Thomas's vulnerability in sharing his stories with the District 11 community. The pain these experiences caused him and loved ones is real and created a very deep wound. As a parent myself I can imagine the heartbreak he feels as his own daughters experience acts of racism, so very painful. It is understandable that the death of a minority could trigger Dr. Thomas given his experiences and warrant a desire to share his stories, to raise awareness. The mistreatment of others is a sad reality in which we are consistently reminded that we live in a broken world. People make choices that have negative impacts on others routinely. I appreciate Dr. Thomas' desire to reach out to the community in an effort to offer support when something as tragic as the treatment of George Floyd, the Atlanta shooting and Boulder shootings occurred. While I believe his intention is to comfort I also believe he is using his position to push a narrative. It is apparent from the comments in his letter that Dr. Thomas believes the United States to be systemically racist. He has repeatedly connected these tragic events to racism. Perhaps racism did play a part. How does he know?

I include direct quotes in the following portion of my letter to better inform the reader of the reasons for my concerns. My intention is not to nit-pick. Please know that my comments are not meant as malicious.

Letter from Dr. Michael Thomas to District 11 community dated June 2, 2020.

To state that our country and society is overall racist is unacceptable. In no way do I wish to minimize Dr. Thomas' personal experiences. *"Can my allies understand the mental anguish about being black in America, or is my life also just a romance to you?"*

It is not a romance. It is truly unfair that individuals judge treatment of a person based on skin color but Dr. Thomas' comments are perpetuating a view of the world that is neither factually accurate nor healing.

"Over the past week, our country witnessed the manifestation of hundreds of years of pent up rage stemming from systemic oppression, specifically as it pertains to race."

- How can Dr. Thomas make this claim?
- While the protesting and riots were denouncing racism how can Dr. Thomas connect them to "rage stemming from systemic oppression"?

- Is Dr. Thomas referencing slavery or does he believe there are currently systems in place creating oppression? And if so what are these systems? Name the specific policies within the systems that are perpetuating oppression.

“No matter how many degrees or letters behind my name, my social value as a black man is always susceptible to question.” Dr. Thomas believes this statement to be true. While I personally disagree with this statement I am not here to argue the point. He has every right to believe what he wishes. My concern is that in his position of authority I ask him to measure the weight of his words. Communicating his thoughts and feelings to future generations has an impact. The message that I fear will be heard by students is no matter how hard I try, it doesn't matter.

- How is it helpful to kids in District 11 to be told this? Why would kids be motivated to work hard if the message sent from their educational leadership is that it doesn't make a difference?

Racism unfortunately is a real part of the world we live in, we absolutely should attempt to eradicate it and raise up future generations to value all people. Do we not also owe it to the students to give encouragement and guidance in how to handle difficulties? Ultimately we have no control over the way others treat us, all we can control is ourselves. We can make choices in how to deal with those situations and the attitudes we have during and after the fact. Regardless of our efforts to better our world there will be trials of many kinds that the students will face, how they choose to handle the trials will shape their life.

“It is not exclusive to the injustices of police and the legal system; structural racism has an omnipresence in multiple industries, whether it be healthcare, education, housing, lending...I could go on.”

- *“structural racism”*? What are these structures that are racist? Name the policies or systems that discriminate based on race.
- Dr. Thomas is making bold statements here that if we wanted to help make change how can we when they aren't identified?
- Does Dr. Thomas believe that unequal outcomes can only be explained by unfair treatment or opportunities?

“The through line is that people of color carry the negative, inequitable outcomes of American society, while also carrying the building of this country on their backs through enslavement, yet with no attributable gain. Do you see the irony in all of this?”

- What does Dr. Thomas mean by inequitable outcomes? Define these terms.
- Are all people of color accomplishing inequitable outcomes?

- Are you saying outcomes of people of color are solely due to American society?
- Are there other aspects in American history that can be attributed to the building of this country? Dr. Thomas appears to have a narrow view of the history of the United States of America. Yes slavery is a tragic part of our history, is it the only aspect we are to focus on? The only piece in the building of our country? Dr. Thomas' statement would lead us to believe so.
- What's the end game? We cannot change history.
- My question to Dr. Thomas is when will America be forgiven of its mistakes?

Racism is not ok, it is bad and when identified should not be ignored. If there are organizations, laws, policies in place that discriminate based upon race they should absolutely be corrected. That said, a difference in outcome does not necessarily mean that bias or discrimination has taken place. To continually focus on the tragedies of our past leaves no room for forgiveness. I personally believe the only path to healing, peace and a better future for our nation requires forgiveness.

Letter from Superintendent Dr. Thomas dated March 25, 2021.

“As a public school district, we accept all students and families for who they are; racism, xenophobia, and hate have no place in our community. We have Board policy governing anti-discriminatory practices and intentionality to create inclusive environments for our students, families and staff.” Given the prior content of this letter I am confused as to the reason the above comments were included. I wholeheartedly agree with the comments. But in a letter discussing the Atlanta and Boulder shootings why did Dr. Thomas include these statements? While it could be argued the shootings were an example of hate they had no correlation to racism or xenophobia (the Atlanta assailant says racism was not a motivating factor). Dr. Thomas appears to be hyper focused on these subjects and bringing them up when discussing unrelated incidents leads me to believe he desires to continue to influence the District 11 students and community to think that all issues are tied to racism.

Letter from Superintendent Dr. Thomas dated April 20, 2021.

“Today we learned the verdict of the Derek Chauvin trial, where he was found guilty on all charges. Understanding this trial represents an overwhelming magnitude of emotions for each of us, I am sharing this message with our community with the hopes of future healing. Our country has witnessed the manifestation of hundreds of years of pent-up rage, stemming from systemic oppression, specifically as it pertains to race.”

- What is Dr. Thomas referring to? What is the manifestation of hundreds of years of pent-up rage? The Derek Chauvin trial? The riots?

- What are the systems that are oppressive based upon race? Name the organizations, policies or principles that are racist.
- Perhaps Derek Chauvin's actions were based on racist judgements. How does Dr. Thomas know this to be the case? How does Dr. Thomas know Derek Chauvin had racism in his heart? Maybe he did. I personally don't believe we can know that based upon the facts of the situation as I understand them. A white man knelt on the neck of a black man. This is horrifying, but does it mean that because their skin color was different racism was involved? In no way do I want to minimize the fact that racism occurs. Unfortunately there are racist people in this world, I am not saying it doesn't happen. I know there are countless stories where people of color have experienced racism. I can see the desire to use this incident to highlight personal experiences. I don't understand how this incident points to systems being oppressive.
- What does Derek Chauvin's trial outcome have to do with the statement of "Our country has witnessed the manifestation of hundreds of years of pent-up rage, stemming from systemic oppression, specifically as it pertains to race."?
- For arguments sake let's presume Derek Chauvin's actions were elicited due to racism, is this individual's choice evidence for systemic oppression? There are racist people. Racist people have jobs and can work/operate within a system such as the police. Does this make the system racist or oppressive? How can we continue to make progress as a nation if we are focusing on an inaccurate cause?

"Our diversity is our strength and I am confident we will remain a leader in this realm as we navigate the waters of guaranteeing equitable practices throughout our district."

- How does Dr. Thomas define equity?
- Are there currently practices within the district that are not equitable?
- I believe the district intends to provide equal opportunities with recognition that some need a little more support to fully access those opportunities. Is Dr. Thomas steering the district toward a utopia ideology of equal outcomes? Does Dr. Thomas believe individuals are responsible for what they do with their opportunities?

[Center for Racial Justice website link included in letter from Dr. Thomas dated April 20, 2021.](https://centerracialjustice.org/resources/resources-for-talking-about-race-racism-and-racialized-violence-with-kids/)
<https://centerracialjustice.org/resources/resources-for-talking-about-race-racism-and-racialized-violence-with-kids/>

This organization perpetuates a narrative of oppressed versus oppressor. I am in complete disbelief that the Superintendent of a public school institution would promote a website that is so biased and ideological. Focus on educating kids in reading, writing, history, math and science please!

Articles linked on this website include titles such as

“What White Children Need to Know About Race”

“The Conversation We Must Have with Our White Children”

“Your 5-year-old is already racially biased. Here’s what you can do about it”

“Kids Are Quoting Trump To Bully Their Classmates and Teachers Don’t Know What To Do About It”

“Right-wing delusions about anti-white propaganda: Why they’re wrong about shielding children from the truth about racism”.

-Does District 11 agree with the concepts in these articles? For example, does District 11 believe that all 5-year-olds are already racist?

- Does District 11 realize there are people in the community who count themselves as “Right-wing”, “Left-wing” and everything in between? Why is the school district promoting political views? As Dr. Thomas was addressing the District 11 community from his position representing District 11 I am addressing these questions to the district.

Excerpts from Mission, Vision and Values page on Center for Racial Justice website are listed below.

“Core Values - These values are the foundation of who we are, what we do, and how we do our work:”

“Racial Justice - Racial justice is our guiding principle for a world in which white supremacy is abolished, and all systems of oppression are dismantled...”

“Collective Liberation - ... Collective liberation requires that we center the voices and lived experiences of those who have been most marginalized...”

“Community - ... We are bold in our dialogue, authentic in our connection, and unapologetic in our love for humanity as we create community while dismantling white supremacy.”

“Centering and Uplifting People of Color - ... We call for the eradication of anti-Blackness in our policies, practices, and belief systems and in our society. And we call for the collective liberation of all Peoples of Color, now.”

“Transformation - ... It wants us as individuals, institutions, and societies to hold the mirror to ourselves, reveal what systems of oppression have hidden from our consciousness, and envision a world where freedom, justice, and liberation are possible.”

- Does District 11 stand by the principles and communications presented on this website?

Of course white supremacy is bad, it should be abolished and systems of oppression dismantled.

- Does District 11 believe the opinions of some should be favored?

I am deeply offended at the content in the letters and resources provided by Superintendent Dr. Michael Thomas. Personally I do not believe children are inherently racist. They recognize things that are different but to judge someone and think they are less than based upon skin color has to be taught. I seriously question the validity of his statement *“We are proud of the rich diversity within our learning community and I want to assure everyone that ALL are welcomed in District 11.”* Is it ok that I disagree with Dr. Thomas’ attitude about society? Does he realize his point of view may not be shared by all and claims made in his letters and resources are divisive? Again, he is welcome to hold any belief he wishes, I ask that he keep his personal opinions to himself. It is wildly inappropriate in his position of superintendent to use his platform to spread his beliefs about society to influence future generations.

Hiring of American Institute For Research

- How much money did District 11 spend on the Chicago based research company American Institute For Research (AIR) to pursue understanding equity in the district?
- How much did District 11 spend on the equity audit?

[Link to District 11 Beyond the Mask Equity Discussion 2/9/21 Recording](#)

A slide was presented during the Beyond the Mask Equity Discussion meeting on February 9 by AIR with data on discrepancies in education levels within a school and between schools within the district. There was no reference information of how the data was collected or when. *“Initial findings from the audit...”* What was the audit of? Test scores? Over a period of time? The lack of reference information is unprofessional, certainly would not be taught as acceptable in a District 11 classroom. While this may seem to be making a big deal out of a small thing or even perhaps an innocent mistake on the part of the research company I think expectations should be high as the district chose to spend funding utilizing this companies services. Has it been value added?

District 11 appears to be using this information to state there are major issues within the district. The data presented is heartbreaking and of course these discrepancies need to be addressed but when presenting to the community wouldn't it be beneficial on behalf of the district to explain how this information came about and why it is important they are moving in the direction they have chosen, how they have arrived at any conclusions?

- Were the discrepancies identified previously and this is why a research company was brought in?
- How long have these discrepancies been present?
- When will the equity audit results be presented to the District 11 community?
- What were the key learnings from the equity audit?
- Does the equity audit explore a variety of possible reasons that education gaps exist? What are the categories? The conversation throughout the meeting implied that the district leaned towards racism/bias as the cause for the discrepancies to which I ask, how do you know racism/bias are the cause? Are attendance, homework, engagement, personal accountability taken into consideration?
- Does District 11 believe that discrepancies in outcomes indicate discrimination?

Director of Equity and Inclusion

- Did District 11 create a new administrative role/salary when hiring the Director of Equity and Inclusion?
- Where did that funding come from?
- How many Executive Professional positions does the district currently employ and what is the total cost to the district of these salaries? What is the percentage of the total budget?
- How many teachers does the district currently employ and what is the total cost to the district of these salaries? What is the percentage of the total budget?
- How many Educational Support Professionals does the district currently employ and what is the total cost to the district of these salaries? What is the percentage of the total budget?

During the February 9, 2021 Beyond the Mask Meeting Equity Discussion Mrs. Knox-Miller, Director of Equity and Inclusion, defined equity as *"We are defining equity as making sure that all of our students get the resources and support that they need to be successful so when we think about equity in our district we're thinking about outcomes."*

We are also defining equity, a further definition, as making sure that we are closing those gaps of the highest and lowest achievement categories and the racial predictability that often comes

with those gaps. So we are trying to figure out like if we see that there are for instance in our district black boys tend to be disciplined more often than their peers we need to close those gaps and that becomes equity in our district. So those are, that's what I think of as equity how do we provide the resources students need to be successful.

And also, one more thing, how do we start tearing down barriers, tearing down fences and getting to a place of like justice and liberation within our systems so that we don't have to do like all this bending and twisting to provide the resources, that we are inherently a just system." (I have attempted to quote directly here, forgive me if there are any mistakes.)

It is concerning that Mrs. Knox-Miller in her position of Director of Equity and Inclusion does not align her definition of equity with District 11's as defined on the equity policy. Her definition is political or ideological in orientation.

- What does Mrs. Knox-Miller mean when she says *"we're thinking about outcomes"*? Is she implying a desire of equal outcomes for all?
- What does raising achievement levels have to do with *"tearing down barriers, tearing down fences ... justice and liberation within our systems"*? What are the barriers or fences present in the system?
- What are specific examples that District 11 is not currently an *"inherently just system"*?
- Will District 11 maintain strict behavioral standards regardless of race, ethnicity or group identity the student may belong to?
- Does the district believe racial predictability of achievement gaps are due to racism/biases within the District 11 institution and its staff?

I recognize Mrs. Knox-Miller's desire to help students. It is apparent that she has a heart for children. She clearly has great care and concern for providing the best education possible to all. The rhetoric she uses is political and guided by an ideology that is not in the students' best interest. I believe her motivation is kind hearted but it is concerning that her methodology could be attributing wrongful cause. It appears that she does not account for individual choice in the prioritization of education, including family choice of supporting a student's education.

If there are systems within the district that are hindering students based on "identity group" they absolutely should be changed. I struggle to believe that District 11 has racist policies in place or that District 11 teachers are racist. Providing opportunities and supporting those who may need a little extra support are one thing. I believe it is District 11's intention to support students in reaching their best possible individual abilities but the language and communications provided from the district regarding equity lean towards an oppressed versus oppressor mindset. While this may be the opinion of some I would like to say that it is not the opinion of all in the District 11 community. To view the school system and society in this

manner is toxic, not at all encouraging and empowering. Could District 11 instead maintain focus on providing equal opportunities (offering additional support where feasible) while reflecting an attitude that encourages self-responsibility on behalf of the student and ownership of the child's welfare by the families? District 11 is committed to supporting every child to reach their greatest potential, what will the student do with the opportunities provided? District 11 will provide the opportunities, how will you shape your outcome?

Individuals and families view the priority of education differently. While I understand the difficult position this puts the District in as it is measured by test scores and enrollment, unfortunately District 11 can only do so much. I encourage you to focus on hiring the best teachers, supporting staff and students, maintaining high expectations and delivering the best education possible. Be the school of choice by being the best. Leave no doubt that an excellent education is District 11's priority as you "dare to empower the whole student to profoundly impact our world."

As a courtesy I have submitted this letter to inform District 11 that I have grave concerns about the direction it is headed in. My hope is that by voicing my concerns District 11 will be open to changing course, seek to send messages of unifying our nation and more importantly focus on educating students in the basics. I will be sharing the information in my letter with others to inform the District 11 community of all that the district has pursued, established and communicated regarding equity thus far. I request a response from District 11 by July 23, 2021 with answers to my questions. If this timeframe is not manageable please notify me of your efforts and a date that you expect to deliver a thorough response. If the district wishes to answer in a format other than written I request it to be in a forum open to the public in person with recording for additional community members to be able to watch at their convenience. It is important for the community to be made aware of the direction the district is headed in and able to express concerns as I have in this letter.

Thank you for your consideration in these matters.

Sincerely,

Lauren Nelson

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