



# 2020

## REFLECTIONS

### Chapter 35 - Looking Inward

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*I've seen a lot of tragedy and shared a lot of pain with others throughout my career, but this week has been one of the hardest.*

I honestly don't have the words to describe my feelings when I saw the video of George Floyd being killed in plain sight. Or when I think about how many Black men and people of color have been killed by police brutality and racism in our country. Or when I think about how many young people have had their dreams extinguished, and doors slammed in their face, because of their skin color. Or when I think about the grief that so many in our communities are feeling right now. I'm heartbroken, I'm angry, I'm exhausted.

I've spent a lot of time listening to others these last few days. Some have articulated a sense of despair—feeling like this is a problem that keeps recurring, and that institutions are more likely to respond by sweeping it under the rug than confronting it head-on. Others have expressed a sense of hope—feeling like we are at a historic crossroads where meaningful change can

occur. I've heard people talk about the difficulties of coping with this pain at a time when we are isolated from others. I've also heard people express their intention to use this pain as fuel to create a more just world. I've heard people talk about the trauma experienced every day in Black communities, like polluted air that is breathed without even thinking about it. And, I've heard people of color from the communities we serve talk about how their everyday struggles can become a source of strength and resiliency.

One perspective that has been shared, across the board, is that actions—not simply words—are needed now. I am a firm believer that this starts by looking inward. Individually, we must be willing to confront any biases that we have learned; as we tragically saw yet again with George Floyd, biases and stereotypes about African Americans remain prevalent in this country, with deadly consequences. Confronting ingrained stereotypes about people of color and other groups is a necessary first step.

We must also be ready to look in the mirror as an institution. We all work for an institution that has been used, throughout history, both to empower and to oppress. As the current standard bearers of this institution's values, we have the responsibility of examining our practices, and changing those practices where necessary, to ensure that our school system is a place of empowerment and equity. We are the ones with the power to change, and we must be the change we want to see.

To that end, I commit to working with leadership to create an infrastructure for us to have these difficult conversations moving forward, so that we can reflect on and challenge our practices, and so that our system can continuously become more equitable for students of color. This is my promise.

Finally, I want to acknowledge the incredible emotional weight that so many of you are carrying right now. It can be overpowering, yet you continue to summon the strength both to carry that pain while also shouldering the heavy responsibility of serving our families, because you know they need our help. For this, you have my lifelong gratitude and admiration.

(This Reflection was jointly crafted by Pia Escudero, Executive Director; Will Celestine, Director, Wellness Programs; and Dr. Daniel Ochoa, SHHS Coordinator, Research & Program Evaluation).

*Sincerely,*

***Pia, Will, and Daniel***

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