

Personal Statement from Stephanie Ingram:

“I have a heavy heart, a tired soul, and words to put together a coherent message have been escaping me up until now. Like many of you, I have been watching the devastating events on the news as they unfurl, scrolling through social media on a regular basis, and reading the lengthy articles on the current state of affairs on the internet. It has taken me more time than I would have liked to decide what I want to say to you. To be honest, the words just are not coming very easy right now. The challenge I am facing comes from trying to look at this problem through many different lenses.

As an educator, I am not quite sure how I would tackle the events over the last week if I were still in the classroom. I already thought we were being spread too thin trying to give hope to our students as we remotely reached into their homes during the Corona quarantine. I cannot imagine what it must have been like opening the Zoom meeting the morning of June 1st and trying to help students make sense of the flashing images on the screen and for some, the horrific events taking place in their own neighborhoods.

The level of trauma and distress this is creating in homes all over the country is immeasurable. I stop to think about my nephews who I am raising for a short while. I am desperately searching for the right things to say to protect them and to make them feel safe. I am walking a fine line as to how much information I am giving to them to process but trying to be mindful of the fact that the world outside will always find its way in.

As a black woman, I am tired. And in the words of Fannie Lou Hamer, I am sick and tired of being tired. Here we are again, 56 years later, at such a critical point in our country's relations. We still fighting for some of the same basic human rights as we did in the last century. As a people, we can do better. For the sake of every American, we have to do better.

As the leader of a large organization in our state I feel reaching out to you is something I absolutely need to do.

Here is the ask. I need ALL of you to use your voice. I need you to speak out against the injustices that are happening. Despite what so many of our detractors believe, this is the work of educators, this is the work of our union, this is work that must be done by us, right now.

Violence against the more marginalized portions of our communities is not a new issue, and without our amplified voices, I feel we will not get to the critical solutions we need to create the change that is so desperately being sought on our streets as of late. Our students, our friends, and our communities need to know that no matter what color, race, or creed we are, we all understand this is wrong and it needs to stop. We need to stand together to stop what is going on, and to come together to create future that ends systemic racism that has led to such blatant inequalities for the brown and black citizens of our country. We cannot wait for the next death to hit national news; we need to address the instances of racism and implicit bias that come before us each day.

I know that it is difficult for some of us to find the strength and the words to address these complex issues. In times like these silence equals complicity, the acceptance of the status quo. But the more people that stop being silent and say something (whether you think your voice does not matter or you are scared to speak out), the more we can move forward – together. Whether it is witnessing and calling out implicit bias, blatant racism, or stepping up to become a more vocal ally – use your voice. When we come together, we can drown out the voices of negativity and hatred and finally be heard.

I am asking you as a black educator and stand-in mother of two black males, to use your voice and allow us to move forward together.

For those of us who are working and educating our Black and Brown students, ask them what they need to feel safe and valued in their learning space right now? What do your non-Black and Brown students need to better understand how to provide support and stand against injustice? What do your students want you to know about their understanding of justice and desire to take action? What are their fears in this moment? What gives them hope?

We have found some good resources in the link below. I hope that these can help you find your voice, or a way to engage in your community and speak out. Let's

get comfortable talking about things that may make some people uncomfortable. That is the only way to start to change the world that we live in right now.

And, as always, I am here to listen to your thoughts and answer any questions or concerns that you may have.”

For resources on race, racism, and racial justice, visit:

<https://www.dsea.org/content/racial-justice>