



LEADERSHIP | TRUST | ADVOCACY

“Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.”—Martin Luther King Jr.

Friends and Colleagues,

On June 3, AASA issued a [statement](#) in response to the murder of George Floyd and the strife and turmoil that has ensued across the United States in the time since. WASA is in full concurrence with the AASA statement.

The conflicts and events that continue to unfold across our country are heart-wrenching and difficult to watch. Sadly, the death of George Floyd is just the latest incident in what seems to be a perpetual cycle of inequity, calamity, and violence—fired by deep-rooted prejudice and unchecked racism in our country.

As you know, WASA stands for the best ideals of *Leadership, Trust, and Advocacy*. WASA’s mission articulates our commitment to leadership in providing equity and excellence in student learning, with competence, integrity, and vision. It seems that now, more than ever, we must recommit to these values and our mission. We must be honest with ourselves and with others about the vulnerability inherent in being a person of color in a society that appears to accept a disproportionate level of violence against black individuals. We must be honest with ourselves and with others about the presence of systemic racism and the barriers that people of color must overcome to find safety, justice, opportunity, happiness, and success.

Many of us cannot even begin to comprehend the feelings, fear, and emotions people of color are experiencing at this time. We cannot truly understand what it is like to live, work, and lead as a person of color. We need to listen and reflect, to better grasp the reality of race and privilege in this country. We need to pursue a deeper understanding of the experiences and feelings of people of color and stand with them.

COVID-19 has pushed many families to the brink. During the course of this pandemic, people of color are experiencing a disparate amount of stress and suffering. The events of the past ten days add to that disproportionality. This is a call to action for school leaders, and the bell is ringing particularly loud for those of us who are white.

The call to action begins by first acknowledging, without qualification, the presence of systemic racism that continues to result in injustice and acts of violence in our country. The call to action continues by working more diligently to carefully examine and evaluate the systems in our schools and school districts. The call involves taking deliberate action to redesign those systems and remove barriers, both visible and invisible, for students of color and their families.

WASA is grounded in *Leadership, Trust, and Advocacy*. WASA remains fully committed to supporting school leaders and helping build their capacity to articulate a vision for schools that is rooted in equity and opportunity for all students. WASA is committed to supporting school leaders in their work to fully achieve this vision.

As WASA members, we are all processing the current reality in different ways and at different levels. There is much for me to learn about the complexities and pervasiveness of racism in our society and institutions. And like the students we serve, it is important to acknowledge that each of us may be in a different place in our learning and our experiences. The important thing is that we will all be learning and growing during these extraordinary times, and that we need to move forward on this journey together.

I remain resolute in my belief that public schools, while not perfect, remain the preeminent vehicle for driving the kind of change necessary to transform the lives of all children and young people for the better. Public schools are the bulwark of our democracy, the backbone of our communities, and our greatest source of hope for a better future. Leading this effort in our schools is an honor and a moral imperative like no other. It is what we are called to do.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "G. Joel Aune". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "G".

G. Joel Aune
Executive Director