

Dear Young Community Leaders,

This letter is in the aftermath of an expected and yet disappointing conclusion of the process related to School Resources Officers (SRO) in Poudre School District. The response from the Board is not surprising. The ability to center BIPOC voices is not in their DNA or ingrained in their systems. The all-white Board has been influenced by the same supremacist system that oppresses us every day. Only through intentional, systematic work could they ever reconnect to what has been stolen from them and us.

You hear from them about their sleepless nights, anxiety, fear, and conflict in making this decision. We believe that conflict is real; it happens when you decide to continue operating within the existing machinery, knowing in your gut, in your heart, that it will affect the most vulnerable and most marginalized, in this case, BIPOC children and children with disabilities. It happens in knowing that your decision will benefit the strongest, the fittest, and the ones at the top of the power dynamic. It is as simple as that. And in the end, the board members will do all kinds of mental gymnastics to live with their decision.

It is also a political game as the current board members were not elected in a vacuum. They have been elected to these places of power by the same community that until very recently claimed to have never known of racism or discrimination in this town. They have to think long term about keeping these positions of power. They believe that their passion for education and their specific knowledge positions them better than any other, to do this job.

So let's talk about their job. The School Board is "a method of governance that involves a set of principles which allow them to practice strategic leadership. The Board of Education sets broad policy that establishes the vision and direction of the District for the Superintendent to implement."

The Board exists to provide strategic leadership, governance, and set policies that establish vision and direction. Yet, through this process, it is beyond evident that they have very little knowledge of what happens to BIPOC and children with disabilities in their district.

You see, these board members were moved, shocked, saddened to hear all of the stories you and your family members brought forward. We believe that is true as well. They read the emails, agonized over the implications SRO's have in your lives, in your psyche, your future, and in your bodies. They said they were moved, just not enough to change their minds or their vote. Their unchanged votes on an unamended contract signify that our issues are news to many of them. They have never heard of Miranda rights being violated at the schools, SRO's being used by administrators to deal with disciplinary issues and to target BIPOC children. They have never seen the numbers related to the school-to-prison pipeline, they have never looked at the data.

You all ran an incredible campaign: searched for data, made videos, hosted panels. Remember all of the research you did to express your experiences and pain in clear data points, and all of

the time interpreting that data, to come to the reasoned conclusion: Police have no business in our schools, and certainly not in their current capacity. Ultimately, that work is supposed to be the Board's job.

Which leads us to the school staff itself. They presented at the end of our comments a powerpoint with the new ideas they have to oversee this contract. That is done for two specific reasons. One: to appease those that felt conflicted about making the decision. It helps the School Board members justify to their friends, family members, and themselves the fact that we will have police officers in schools with our children even after hearing what they have heard and seen what they have seen. The second reason is to position school staff within the system of education to more power as they are showing "leadership," so someone will have a raise, a promotion, to be the lead on Equity and Diversity out of this situation.

Here is the thing we want you to consider, the points made on that powerpoint were part of their job in the first place. The school administration and staff should have transparent data already; they should have been making strategic decisions within the school based on that data; they should have been hosting conversations and listening to all the stories so the board and the public can access it easily. That powerpoint was not a list with great new ideas to implement; it was a list of things the Poudre School District should have been doing to oversee that contract a long time ago. We should read it for what it is.

Also, remember that we used to have a Spanish speaking woman of color with a Ph.D. who specialized and worked exclusively in diversity and equity within the District. Our current Superintendent demoted her and ultimately disseminated her job duties throughout the District. She did this despite the outcry of many BIPOC parents.

Remember that the Diversity Action Committee meeting used to be open to the whole community, open for questioning the District's agenda and their data driving those decisions. These meetings have become closed to the public and warped into an exclusive "working group" accessible only by invitation to a select few.

The School District will tell you many reasons as to why they made those decisions, and they will never take responsibility for their mistakes. We do not expect a response from them saying, "it was a mistake." We know this is completely counter to what they ask from you in their buildings. They always ask students to accept when they make mistakes and be accountable. They rarely do so.

Please remember the author and activist James Baldwin's words, "I can't believe what you say, because I see what you do." Here is a link to his fantastic interview about white people's good intentions', words, and no actions: <https://youtu.be/a6WIM1dca18>.

Yet, in the face of setbacks and resistance, we must remember to bring joy to the movement. Celebrate the incredible campaign you ran, celebrate the relationships created, the friends

made along the way. Celebrate knowing that we, older generations of community leaders, are ready and here to support you, to let you lead and do the work you need us to do. Celebrate that you are not alone in your struggle, and celebrate the white allies that did show up and worked alongside you. Celebrate the vote of Naomi Johnson and invite her to the celebration. Breaking from the oppressive systems can be a very lonely space.

Which leads us to the last point of our open letter. As disappointing as the result was, as heartbreaking as it is to see in action that they value other things over the lives and experiences of black, indigenous, children of color, we the people are bigger and stronger than that. We, the people, must continue organizing and showing up because here is how the system continues to stay in place: they count on your energy and passion to dissipate. They count on placating us with their good intentions and their powerpoints. They rely on us moving on to the next thing and forgetting how they voted and their work that was not being done.

From us, know we are here for you. We believe in you, we believe you, and we will fight with you, put our resources at your disposal, and be at your side when you need us.

With you in the struggle and so very proud of you,

The BIPOC Alliance.