



KIPP PUBLIC SCHOOLS JACKSONVILLE EQUITY FOR ALL



LEADING WITH RACIAL EQUITY AND JUSTICE

*By Dr. Jennifer Brown - Executive Director, KIPP Public Schools Jacksonville
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“In this country, teaching Black people to read has always been an act of social justice.”

Nearly 15 months ago I spoke those words in a large conference room during a quarterly meeting of the KIPP Foundation Board of Directors. That meeting was a pivotal moment for the future direction of the entire KIPP network because senior leaders- with input from Executive Directors like myself- were determining how our collective commitment to racial justice and equity could be actualized in KIPP schools around the country. Some board members expressed concerns that a focus on racial or social justice would distract from the “real work” of teaching and learning, and that the network’s stagnant academic results could worsen. And when asked pointedly by a Board member about the potential to dilute our focus and resources, I responded with that declaration.

To me, leading with a commitment to racial justice and equity means ensuring that the students who are ultimately in my charge- 97% of whom are Black- are taught WELL. We must not forget that there was a time when it was illegal for Black people to learn to read. Literacy is liberation, and denial of that aspect of liberation to Black people has had long-lasting ramifications. As Executive Director, my most impactful contribution to the fight for racial justice and equity is creating effective schools. That IS my protest and my power.

High quality teaching in our classrooms is not only about getting great academic results; it must also be about encouraging and equipping our students -from the north and west sides of Jacksonville- to use their voices to call out injustice and to build a more just world. And I believe that in all effective organizations, that type of courageous action starts at the top. In a practical sense, applying an equity lens to our organization means continuing to closely analyze our talent practices, our student code of conduct and other disciplinary policies, our professional development offerings, our core content curricula, our financial decisions and our 2025 strategic plan; to ask ourselves important questions when making decisions, “Who was/was not at the table when this decision was made?”

Does this decision negatively impact marginalized groups? Does it reinforce anti-Blackness?"

The families of 1600 students have entrusted their academic education to us and it is our duty to ensure that those KIPPsters arrive each day at schools where their identities are affirmed, their voices are heard, their safety is prioritized, their intelligence is honored, and they are loved. What we do- teaching and learning- has not changed (though we will continue to get better at it). But why we do this work must be "illuminated and stamped," as my colleague Jessica Cunningham Akoto, ED of KIPP Philadelphia, has noted. I am compelled to do this work because systemic racism must be dismantled and violence against Black communities must cease.

I'm grateful for everyone who has taken up this fight, because it is a long and wearisome one. We will get discouraged and fatigued, but we must not lose heart. As Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. encouragingly declared, "The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice." A more just world can be a reality if we each exercise our power in the sphere of our own influence. You can find me doing my part at KIPP Public Schools Jacksonville.

KIPP JACKSONVILLE COMMITMENT

High quality teaching in our classrooms is not only about getting great academic results; it must also be about encouraging and equipping our students to use their voices to call out injustice and to build a more just world. We are more committed than ever to making sure ALL decisions that affect students at KIPP Jacksonville are filtered through a lens of equity and racial justice.

KIPP JACKSONVILLE MISSION

Together with families and communities, we create joyful, academically excellent schools that prepare students with the skills and confidence to pursue the paths they choose - college, career and beyond - so they can lead fulfilling lives and build a more just world.