Dear Menta Family,

I was in the mist of writing a letter to all of you this morning and I came across a letter written by one of our brilliant principals that she had sent to her staff and families regarding the unrest going on around our nation. I was so moved by her words. They are heartfelt words built on experience, passion and wisdom! I threw my letter away as it couldn’t compare to the words written by Ms. Adrienne Porter to her staff! I urge you to take to heart her profound wisdom, love and passion for all mankind! Thank you Adrienne for your leadership and passion!!

Principal’s Corner

By Adrienne Porter Principal Menta Academy Chicago West

I have been up for hours thinking about what to say to you given not just the (Covid19 pandemic) but now grappling with numerous protests, riots and revolutions going on in our nation. My original message to be posted this morning was one of joy and excitement. We had 18 students that graduated last week. When they were counted out by other schools and referred to our care, parents would come to us confused, dejected, depressed and feeling hopeless. MACW was instrumental in turning those lives around. Last Friday, our school community was filled with pride at seeing those kids move forward to the next chapter in their lives. At one point, we were accompanied by police escort leading the procession with blaring sirens and resounding horns. MACW went to 12 different destinations. That officer is a champion for our students inside the building, in the community, in the courts and at the precinct (if need be). He is not at all like the officers in Minneapolis. He is one of the good guys. (Yet, he had a brick thrown Sunday night. It hit him in the back of his leg).

What was happening Friday evening, in other parts of the country (and around the world) was spilling over onto Chicago streets. By night fall, the happiness and hope that we created for our students and families had quickly faded from our memories and replaced with mayhem. Almost everything that we built up as a city was quickly crumbling around us. I saw a photo of a student in his blue graduation gown. He was standing in front of a burning building. What a contrast to witness. At that time, I thought about our students and their families. What were they doing? How were they feeling and coping with the situations? What kind of questions and emotions would we be facing on this Monday morning? This weekend, select teams within Menta and MACW began to call all of our families and staff. We conducted wellness checks to confirm family and community conditions. I am pleased to report that we are all "Ok." Still, a few student families stated that they were very concerned about how their families would eat since stores like Jewels, Wal-Mart, 7Eleven, Walgreens, CVS, and Target have been looted and burned down in their communities. This means that they will struggle to get groceries and medicines. As a school, this morning we are going to problem solve to determine how, when and what we can do to support our MACW families. The corporate and leadership teams will spend the day accessing the situation in different areas of the city to problem solve and plan. However, today due to safety concerns in the communities, we will not have food deliveries. The majority of families that we spoke to reported that they are fine, but the next few days are a concern.

Although I understand the pain, anger and frustration of a people who want real justice, I also understand the hurt, humiliation, embarrassment, sadness, and depression of a community at watching time roll back on a clock to the riots of the 1960s. If you have families so-called protesting, then there is a way to do that. All eyes are on this city and our nation is focused on what we do here in Chicago as Americans, next. We have the attention of not just Black Americans but of a people (and that includes
people of power and diverse groups of Americans). We don't want to mess things up by making poor choices, now. What I saw played out in the media yesterday is no longer about Mr. Floyd but there are anterior motives in play. I don't condone but can understand the anger and outrage of a depressed people. I lived it as a child back in the 60's in Chicago. I saw Madison Street and Chicago Avenue looted and burned down and people physically hurting each other for scraps. As a matter of fact, MACW is situated on the Westside of Chicago in urban communities surrounded by Madison Street, Pulaski, Chicago Avenue, Cermak and Cicero. My family had no car or anywhere to go for food. Schools were not as supportive as we are today. We went hungry for a long time until the government decided to rebuild communities hurt by riots just like these we see today. The bottom line is that we do have pockets of people that are exploiting this situation and using Floyd's name in vain to corrupt a cause, steal, and create chaos for selfish gains. My message to them is that this is not the way to bring about real change. You are feeding into the hands of those with pre-judged notions about who we are as a people (Black and non-Black).

My neighbors asked why people are so angry to the extent that they are willing to hurt themselves and their communities. Let me be clear, the issues facing our cities are not just about Minneapolis and George Floyd, but about lots of George Floyds who have been unjustly silenced. The issue is about not getting justice for those people and fearing for the lives of others. This is a cycle in history that repeats itself over and over again. How do we break this curse - this chain? It's about a perceived double standard playing out on the streets and in our judicial system. This is why the peaceful protesters chant, "No justice...no peace." They are angry, frustrated and tired at not being heard. I get it. As a community of diverse families we support those who are in pain and hurting at the senseless act played out on video by a group of police officers against an unarmed, compliant, and loved African American man who pleaded to live. In that moment, he was accused, judged in the open because of who he represented in a group of people, he laid on a cold dirty street, convicted without a jury of his peers and discounted as a human being. He expired on that dirty street due to an inappropriate knee restraint against his neck. This type of behavior happens far too often in our cities by a few disturbed individuals in authority. But, it is not the act of a majority of officers. It is not the act of helpless families with small children and their elders. Why do they have to suffer senselessly? I am still struggling with answers and looking for the right leadership to move forward as a nation. And so, I will leave you with this thought. Support your neighbors. Help the elderly and sick. If you can when the time comes volunteer to rebuild and revitalize Chicago and its surrounding suburbs. As always, reach out to us for assistance. If we can't help you directly then we will find a way to connect you to appropriate needed resources. Parents keep an eye on your kids. If possible, keep them home and safe with you. In time, this too will past with actionable change. However, in the interim remember that Covid19 still exists so be mindful and practice safe habits.