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To: Doug McCurry <dougmc Curry@achievementfirst.org>
Subject: Important network updates

AF Team & Family -

We know you are racing for a successful, final sprint to summer, but we are asking you to pause for a moment for several important updates: the external investigator report from the AF Amistad High incident, an overview of key HR changes we are making, and our network priorities for 2019-2020.

We know trust has been broken in our community this year, and we have been working hard to rebuild it - not just with our words, but with our actions. We can't go back in time, but we can make sure that we really embrace the challenge, learn from it, and lead meaningful change in how we operate -- and, most importantly, in how we ensure a more consistently excellent experience for scholars across our network. We are grateful that we have our new core values to guide us in this work.

External investigation: We asked the independent Amistad High Board in January to take the unprecedented step of hiring an external investigator to look into how AF handled the incident at AF Amistad High and to make specific recommendations. We wanted the transparency and accountability. The Board released the report late last night, and we are sharing it with all of you here. Since our actions were what was being investigated, no AF network staff were a part of the board deliberations, and we received a copy at the same time the public did. We cooperated fully with the investigation, and we are not surprised by any of the conclusions. We feel tremendous responsibility for our personal and network failures, and we are fully committed to implementing all the recommendations - and, in fact, going beyond what was asked for.

Changes to HR Practices: Based on our internal debrief of January, we already set in motion four big changes. First, AF needs even clearer rules to draw bright lines based on our values around the very limited number of instances in which any adult should put hands on a student (to be followed this summer by clear expectations regarding the respectful tone our scholars and families should always expect from us). You can find our new Restraint and Physicality policy here. Second, AF teammates need a more accessible, transparent and safe process for reporting HR concerns, including clarity around issue escalation and resolution. Third, we need stronger personnel file practices to ensure incidents with teammates have documentation that is maintained properly and travels with them between schools. We need to ensure we always reflect on and evaluate any one incident in the context of any past incidents for that employee. Fourth, there was unacceptably weak follow-through on the limited steps we agreed to for the October incident. We need stronger oversight to ensure senior leader accountability for disciplinary actions. You can find more detail here.

Changes to our Scholars' Experience: Our 5-year vision process culminated last October with the headline: The next five years at AF are about GREAT TEACHING fueling an EXCEPTIONAL STUDENT EXPERIENCE. While this work was already in motion, the events of this winter added extra fuel and focus, and we are excited to take concrete steps toward this vision in 19-20.

For GREAT TEACHING

- **Vision of Excellent Teaching & Curriculum:** While we have made huge strides in terms of rigor in the last 5 years, it's time for another significant upgrade to our "Essentials of Effective Instruction." We are getting final principal input this month on a new draft that dials up student-teacher relationships, student voice and discourse, and student independence. Over the course of the year, we'll be collecting video and leading trainings for teachers and leaders to calibrate to this vision. We are also starting a multi-year curriculum upgrade to ensure that all aspects of our curriculum (assessments, FOIs, units, DLRs, etc.) and training support this new vision.
- **Focus on Mindsets & Relationships:** Many of you have said that our New Teacher Training focuses too much on taxonomy skills and compliance, and you are right. We are significantly upgrading NTT to double the amount of time we spend on teacher mindsets. And we will be providing leaders with resources to support all teachers on essential student-teacher relationship mindsets. These changes will then flow into Week 6 and into the school year. We have to make sure how we spend our time reflects what we care about. Our key measures and regular reflections will go beyond "on task" to include classroom culture, student-teacher relationships, and the overall student experience.

For STUDENT EXPERIENCE

- **Changes to School Culture Expectations & Systems Based on Racial Equity Lens:** Principal cohorts have been working together to clearly name "stop do" and "must do" actions, especially those related to student feedback systems (behavior systems) and core student expectations (e.g. common pictures); cohorts are using the Leading for Racial Equity questions to do this work.
- **Social-Emotional Learning:** We are supporting the strong execution of best-in-class socio-emotional programs across many of our schools; 11 elementary schools are piloting the Yale Ruler program, and 9 middle schools are leveraging the Valor Collegiate Compass Circle work. We will do R & D with HS principals, deans, and teachers to better understand HS students' social-emotional needs and have a plan to support HS SEL in 20-21.
- **R&D to Set 20-21 Priorities:** We know we do not yet have all the answers when it comes to what it will take to fulfill our ambitious student experience vision. We will continue to do deeper R & D, looking at the strongest schools and classrooms within and outside AF in terms of achievement, student investment surveys, and parent investment surveys - and then capture and share these practices. We will also look into how schedule and staffing decisions (including length & structure of the school day) and other school policies impact the student & teacher experience so that we can make smart changes for the future.

Expanding the Team: We are investing resources to lead and support this important work. We are very fortunate to have a new VP of Student Experience, Charmayne Joseph, who will lead a very talented team with two elementary directors, two middle school directors, and one high school director. This will enable the team to provide resources, training, and targeted on-site support for schools. We are also searching now for a new VP of Great Teaching. De-Lea Deane, our VP of Equity, will be leaning in with both teams to ensure we bring a Racial Equity lens to all of this work. We also know we don't have all the expertise we need internally, so we are enlisting the help of the National Equity Project to lead a series of planning meetings with senior leaders to ensure our 2020-21 strategy is even stronger in living our Lead for Racial Equity value.

Changing what we measure: We cannot hope to bring about meaningful change without changing what we measure and celebrate. The AF Report Card is the ultimate measure of school success at AF, and it's the primary tool we use to help evaluate and support principals and regional superintendents. We are proposing to principals this month to significantly elevate the points associated with student surveys, parent surveys, and other equity measures. We need to embrace and live an expanded definition of student success.

If you have any feedback or suggestions as you read through any of these updates, please email us back directly or share your thoughts anonymously here. We would love to hear directly from you.

At AF, we believe in embracing challenge. In the last 20 years, we have done it over and over, and we have collectively gotten stronger. This last chapter has been particularly tough -- for us, for many of you, and especially for the AF Amistad High community. Let's work together to make sure we embrace this challenge to deliver the student experience our scholars deserve.

With love,

Doug & Dacia