



A Message from Junior Achievement CEO, Jennifer Burk

"There is no doubt that thousands of local families and children, especially students of color and low-income populations, face unjust barriers to a quality education during a 'normal' time. . . . We owe it to our kids and community to provide our greatest attention and resources to address these inequalities."

Dear Friends,

I wrote those words in my op-ed published in the Indianapolis Recorder on May 4th. That article was written against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on our young people.

The killing of George Floyd on May 25th serves as just the latest horrific example of these systemic inequalities, which reach beyond equitable educational opportunities to the fundamental right to life, and liberty.

We know this is nothing new. We may have wanted to say and do the right thing many times before . . . to let everyone know that we want it to be different. But maybe we stayed silent, worried we'd say the wrong thing, something ignorant or unintentionally offensive.

Now, however, is the time to speak from our hearts. Not doing so because my skin isn't brown or black is worse than saying something that might be less than perfect. So, to my black and brown friends, acquaintances and those I don't know, I grieve with you. I want it to be different. I want to link arms and join together in this fight.

It is time to embrace the notion that **nothing changes if nothing changes**. This means doing more than speaking out – although that is important; it means doing more than listening and learning – although that is critical. It also means taking stock of specific opportunities we each have to take action and make a difference.

Both personally and as CEO of Junior Achievement of Central Indiana (JA), I pledge to take action to dismantle institutional racism. This starts with doing all I can, with the help of my JA colleagues, board members and partners, to achieve JA's vision:

"Central Indiana children and teens will have equitable and inclusive opportunities to experience the positive impact of JA's Pre-K through 12th grade programs delivered in partnership with educators and business/industry volunteers. Every child will understand how his or her unique set of interests and abilities align with opportunities for future career success, and will possess

the knowledge, skills and confidence needed to achieve career goals. This will contribute to a sustained increase in high school graduation rates and achievement of post-secondary plans, a decrease in generational poverty, a well-prepared talent pipeline for businesses, and a stronger central Indiana workforce and community.”

We are firmly committed to inspiring and empowering children of color throughout central Indiana, including all those who are among our community’s most underserved and vulnerable. Last year, JA programs impacted close to 40,000 young people, with more than 60% attending underserved schools (51% or greater participation in free and reduced lunch program). The number of underserved students impacted by JA programs has increased every year for the last ten years.

However, **we can and will do more**. We will prioritize diversity, inclusion and equity in all aspects of our policies, procedures and practices. This includes striving for staff, board and volunteer representation that better mirrors the diversity of our community. We will continue to increase our reach to more students of color and will invest resources in program modifications that ensure cultural relevance and diverse visual representation. We will support, collaborate and partner with people and organizations joining in this effort to dismantle racism and build a better future for us all. And we will continue to listen, to learn and to love.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Burk

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CEO

Junior Achievement of Central Indiana