



TOGETHER WE'RE STRONGER

October 28, 2018

Dear AIMS Colleagues,

I am writing this letter on Sunday morning, trying to imagine what it will be like for you to enter your school communities on Monday morning in the wake of the senseless violence that has occurred in recent days. In the midst of the sadness, confusion and outrage that each of us may feel, every adult who works in our schools is again called to be a care-taker, a comforter, an interpreter, and an exemplar of decency, fairness, and optimism. This is a deeply challenging and fundamentally essential call for us to answer.

It's hard to identify where the most recent wave of violence began, but it seems as if we have been overwhelmed by increasingly extreme events. Was it with a police shooting or with a gang murder in the past weeks? Was it with the horrific death of Jamal Khashoggi in Turkey? Was it with the explosive devices mailed to politicians and philanthropists close to home? Surely, the murder yesterday, on the Jewish Sabbath, of eleven worshipers at a Pittsburgh synagogue defies comprehension.

In the face of such events, our thoughts may inevitably turn to other examples of extreme violence: Charleston, Charlottesville, Orlando, Parkland, Newtown, Las Vegas. When individuals are targeted because of their race, religion, ethnicity, or sexual orientation, because they are perceived as "other," we are again reminded of the deeply-rooted prejudices in our society and their powerful and continuing effects. Attacks on schools and houses of worship are particularly hard for us to understand; we trust that these are places of respect, community, and hope.

This morning I read a piece in the New York Times by Howard Fineman, and I commend it to you. The author grew up in the Squirrel Hill neighborhood in Pittsburgh and was raised in the Tree of Life synagogue, where yesterday's shooting took place. He reminds us that in the face of hate, "...America's gifts are not easily preserved." As I read his deeply-felt reflection, suffused with both despair and hope, I imagined the Tree of Life synagogue as

being much like a school. It is a place of learning and growth and joy and community. Like our religious schools within the AIMS family, it is a place of worship. Like all of our schools, it is a place with a mission, with a foundation of values and beliefs, and with inherent dignity and worth.

As we answer the call of school work again this week, my hope is that we might all feel a part of the Tree of Life synagogue, in its grief and in its hope for its future. As we share the pain brought about by acts of hate, we can bring forth renewed faith in our collective future by caring for one another, by challenging ourselves and our students to listen and learn deeply, and by lifting up the welcoming school communities that give us all meaning and purpose.

With respect for what you do every day,

Peter