

A Proper Non-Response to Civil Protests

By Richard Norman Rickey

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I was appalled watching the video of the police officer actions against our fellow American citizen George Floyd. What soon followed were some peaceful protests, civil unrest, and rioting. Amidst the events of recent weeks has come an expectation that those in positions of leadership should come out with statements and actions that support these various protests and movements for change. On social media we have been asked to formally provide our organizations response to “systemic racism”, “police brutality”, and “black lives matter” to name a few. If you don’t issue a statement you are accused of being a racist or being complicit.

We have not responded, and we are not racist. I want to explain why. As a publicly supported school it is not appropriate for us to make a statement on these current events. Our founding and official published public charter school statement (and a federal and state requirement to operate as a public school) has always been that **“we will not discriminate on the basis of sex, national origin, ethnicity, religion, disability, academic, athletic or artistic ability, or the district the child would otherwise attend without regard to disability or handicapping condition. We will serve eligible students with disabilities and handicapping conditions”**.

Nothing else should be needed except our continued commitment to that statement of principle. It should be sufficient that our founding statement, and our subsequent actions, have been promoting equality and non-discrimination since our founding in 1995. This alone should shield us from the criticism that we need to say or do more. Providing additional statements is a surefire way to offend half of your customers. It’s a “gotcha trap”. I often caution my employees, that because we are a tax supported public school, we must never use our position as educators to try to indoctrinate or persuade our students to be liberal or conservative, democrat or republican, religious or an atheist. One reason for the growth of home schooling is that many parents are justifiably fed up with public school teachers promoting political points of view and values that directly contradict those of these same tax paying families.

All of us here at Orenda Education, and at our Orenda Charter School campuses, will continue to stay focused on the work of educating your children in the “three R’s”, and to do so while remaining as neutral as possible when pressed to take a side. We think that is the proper role of a tax supported public entity.