

## **A Message from Alameda County Superintendent of Schools L. Karen Monroe Taking a Stand: Voices of Democracy | November 2017**

Video Message Transcript:

As this month comes to a close, I'm taking time to reflect and give thanks. In November we commemorated Veterans Day, Election Day, and Thanksgiving, and I'm grateful for our veterans who served so valiantly and to live in a country where the values of freedom and democracy are prized.

Recently, I met a man who shared his frustrations that many public schools no longer require students to say the Pledge of Allegiance. I thought about how his viewpoint relates to the national conversation surrounding professional and student athletes "taking a knee" in silent protest. I've joined with scores of others as I reflect on what's being accomplished and whether it will have lasting impact.

Taking a seat in a section of the bus not meant for you. Taking a ballot application to the registrar's office daily until it's accepted. Taking a long walk through angry crowds just to receive an education. I can't help but think of some of the then unprecedented actions of everyday citizens to make their voices heard against apathy, to force change in a quest for equality. Seemingly small actions, had impactful and rippling effects, and without these varied acts of protest, what would be different today?

I've had candid and at times challenging, conversations with people about this issue, and I instinctively think of my own family. While my mother and grandmother were educators, my father and brother served in the U.S. Army - like others before them and many since, they were proud to serve their country. They will be the first to tell you, they chose to serve so that every citizen would have the freedom of choice to voice their opinions.

How we express dissenting thoughts, how we facilitate challenging conversations, how we show respect for the plight of others is what makes the difference. Our students should not be silenced when expressing their views, but provided effective forums for discourse and action that foster an environment of respect while pushing for actions of change.

In Alameda County, our students represent a diversity of ethnicities, language groups, socioeconomic backgrounds, gender identities, and political viewpoints. There are many ways to express oneself. A fight for one is a fight for all. DACA students coming together in unity. Transgender students seeking equality. Students of African descent speaking out against generational oppression based on the color of their skin. These students use silent actions and make loud statements to create thought provoking dialogue and tell the world that they matter. Their issues matter. Their communities matter.

I support our youth in taking a strategic and informed stand against any injustices they see. And I stand with teachers, educational staff, and leaders as we continue to support our youth in forging a free and just path to our future.

Tell us what you're thinking. Share your thoughts with us on social media. As always I appreciate your voice and partnership.