

Open Letter to Our Community:

Start: Empowerment stands in solidarity with the Black community within and beyond Minnesota during these extremely difficult times following the death of George Floyd and countless other victims such as Ahmaud Arbery and Breonna Taylor—thus the subsequent protests that have been occurring.

Although our purpose in establishing Start: Empowerment is to bring social and environmental justice into the classroom to reform the U.S education system, our work does not stop inside the classroom. Rather, we actively seek to bridge the gap between education and action through community organizing and public education. Our work extends to the environments and communities which we live in everyday. Acts of racism and oppression against BIPOC¹ *indeed* affect the social environments we traverse everyday, and they should not be tolerated. That is why we are taking a pledge against police brutality. In order to dismantle the racist underbelly that permeates police institutions across the nation, we urge you to push your leaders to defund the police while investing in social services and establishing forms of mutual aid and care, in addition to establishing alternative forms of safety and accountability. Whether it's race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, religion, or any other identities that are held, Start: Empowerment prides itself on fostering a community of inclusion, diversity, and equity, where we actively fight against white supremacy now and always.

As Angela Davis, a political activist, author, and professor emeritus of UC Santa Cruz, "You have to act as if it were possible to radically transform the world. And you have to do it all the time." As students and educators of Start: Empowerment, we are agents of change, and are in this fight together by using the power of education, the power of courage and the power of compassion to take action. However, we can only build a better future if we continue to educate ourselves and allow marginalized voices to be heard.

Therefore, we are wholeheartedly committed to the issues of racial justice plaguing our country and are taking action to support BIPOC individuals in the following ways:

- To be fully transparent about our commitment in making tangible and continued actions for progress, including providing regular updates through our social media and accounts, blogs, and newsletters.

¹ Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color

- To encourage and support the amplification of our BIPOC student voices through active advising that includes access to student-centered project grants, mentorship opportunities, internships and scholarships, and networking with nonprofits and community organizations.
- To prioritize consistent critical dialogue and action with our students, allied teachers and staff on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) issues including intersectionality, systemic racism, power dynamics, saviorism, 'White Privilege', and impacts of socioeconomic status disparities.
 - To better understand, identify and address how anti-Blackness shows up in our space, both physically and interpersonally.
- To further integrate community organizing on different social justice issues, including police brutality, into our pre-existing activism curriculum and community-centered student projects.
- To collaborate and partner with existing social justice organizations to solve community issues, e.g. Black Lives Matter (BLM) NYC, Color of Change, and other local restorative justice organizations.

In closing, we want to uplift and encourage everyone who is making a difference in their own communities and provide a mechanism in which you can do so. Please see our blog for an evolving directory filled with links to articles and books to learn more, as well as ways to take action. This list is based on *you*, your posts, your emails, your listings that we would love to circulate, so please keep sharing. And finally, we, at Start: Empowerment, are in full support of those executing their civil right to protest for their lives and for the lives of their community. We are standing alongside you in the streets.

In solidarity,

Alexia Leclercq & Kiersten Blake

Co-founders of Start: Empowerment