



We Believe...

Black Lives Matter.

When we juxtapose the arc of human history – in which the first great empires and birthplaces of economic prosperity, educational enterprise, scientific discovery, technological advancement, religion, government, and civilization find their roots in African, Indigenous, Central and Eastern Asian peoples – against our time in history, in which we live in a country whose global power and influence descends from violent systems of oppression, genocide, and cultural appropriation that have allowed for and made pervasive massive racial, economic, social, and civil disparities, we cannot help but to protest this reality and its impact on ourselves, our children, and our communities.

We, at Believe Memphis Academy Charter School, bring together the diverse identities, talents, backgrounds, and experiences of our staff, Board of Directors, families, and community partners in recognition that we have all been exposed to and affected by the impact of systemic racism, and we refuse to stand by and allow them to continue for another generation.

We know and recognize that these systems permeate through all sectors of our society, including and not limited to healthcare, housing, public services, law enforcement, nutrition, and education. We also know that no single approach can undo generations of oppression, terror, and injustice experienced by communities of color, with egregiously destructive impacts on Black and Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC) in our country.

And yet, the right of every child in every community – in the wealthiest nation in human history – to access and receive a free, public, high-quality education that prepares them to pursue social and economic opportunity, is a right that has too long been delayed and too far been denied. The fight for this right is the civil rights and social justice issue of our generation.

In an era where a college degree stands as the gate keeper to social and economic mobility, here are the present realities of our day:

- Georgetown University predicted that in 2020, 65 percent of all jobs in the economy required post-secondary education and training¹.
- Memphis-Shelby County Schools serves around 90,000 children, and 71,000 children are economically disadvantaged (over 40,000 children in Memphis live in homes that make less than \$11,000 per year, making our childhood poverty rate the highest in the nation of any metropolitan city in America²).
- While 93 percent of children in our district are children of color, Black and Hispanic students in SCS schools, on average, perform 3 grade levels behind their white peers according to state tests³.
- More than 3 in 4 children in grades 3-8 cannot demonstrate on grade level reading proficiency.
- 11 percent of high school students living in poverty demonstrate college-readiness on the ACT, resulting in 58 percent of Memphis students who enroll in college having to take remedial freshman courses⁴.
- Studies show that students who take freshman remedial courses are 74 percent less likely to graduate college, even within 6 years⁵.
- A child born into poverty who earns a college degree has a 90 percent chance of escaping poverty.⁶

We know that our children are whole, brilliant, resilient, curious, and capable. These present realities are not representative of our children and cannot remain unchallenged. This is why we protest. Education is how we protest.

Our work is teaching. And, we will change the world – if necessary – to do it.

¹ <https://cew.georgetown.edu/cew-reports/recovery-job-growth-and-education-requirements-through-2020/>

² <https://www.memphis.edu/socialwork/research/2019povertyfactsheet.pdf>

³ <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/04/29/upshot/money-race-and-success-how-your-school-district-compares.html?searchResultPosition=1&mtrref=www.nytimes.com&qwh=60BEAD8AA889F702B601FEB7395500B2&gwt=pav&assetType=PAYWALL>

⁴ <https://www.commercialappeal.com/story/news/education/2019/02/13/memphis-schools-college-readiness-remedial-courses/2859812002/>

⁵ <https://edreformnow.org/accountability/out-of-pocket-the-high-cost-of-inadequate-high-schools-and-high-school-student-achievement-on-college-affordability/>

⁶ https://www.pewtrusts.org/-/media/legacy/uploadedfiles/wwwpewtrustsorg/reports/economic_mobility/pursuingamericandreampdf.pdf

Believe Memphis Academy Charter School prepares students in grades 4-8 with the academic rigor, robust supports, and leadership development necessary to excel in high school, thrive in college, and lead lives full of opportunity.



Teaching Means to Us...

We see the children we teach. We teach unique, brilliant, funny, quirky, and complex middle school students. We strive to know them in their fullness. We are confident in their ability to do great things inside and outside the classroom walls. We find ways to learn about and connect with their individual experiences and knowledge they bring to our classrooms, so we can guide them to build on those strengths in the classroom. We know our students are not monolithic but they come with diverse experiences and backgrounds that we must acknowledge to truly see them. We commit to dedicating the time to deeply analyze their academic work to determine what they know and where we need to go next. We thoughtfully choose texts and school experiences that will broaden their knowledge base and help them to dream new possibilities for who they want to be in the future. Really seeing the kids we teach takes time—time on the phone between classes or after hours with kids and their families, time during lessons to listen for just ten more seconds to really diagnose what’s going on, time after school pouring over student work and charting the next day’s path to make sure every student understands. We spend this time, though, knowing that it is through all these small moments and actions that build the deepest relationships with our students and the foundation of trust needed for true learning and development to happen.

We create a safe environment for children to learn and thrive. For too long and in too many places, students of color – specifically Black, Latinx, and Indigenous students – have had to navigate classroom spaces that lack physical, emotional, and academic safety. As teachers, we know that learning cannot take place if students do not feel safe. We work to establish a physically safe classroom space where children know what to expect and are collaborators in setting norms and expectations. We create systems and routines in our classrooms and our practice that ensure we see and respond to all student work, so children feel an emotional connection with us and know we are trusted guides in the learning process. We use data to intentionally push our students – in the right moment and in the right place – to go to the edges of what feels comfortable to take academic risks because we believe that is where deepest learning and growing can happen.

We provide intentional opportunities for students to see their own success and foster intrinsic motivation toward growth. Small wins are everything in the classroom. We believe that establishing growth mindsets in our students is essential to their long-term success. If they get a problem wrong, we help to point out what aspects of their solution are right and provide them with the targeted feedback they need to see full success on another try. We mark-up student work – on every problem, every time – so they can celebrate each moment of success. We respect students’ intelligence and dignity to know they can evaluate the errors that happen in a classroom and, through discussion, collectively come to a greater understanding than they might have come to on their own. We know it is our job to not just point out how to correct an error, but how to replicate current successes. Through the process, the individual benefits and the collective classroom culture and identity is established and solidified.

We know our students’ success is dependent on the team with whom we work and collaborate. As teachers at Believe, we do not work in a silo. We push, question, celebrate, and learn from the colleagues around us. We know that what we can do together is so much greater than what we could do alone. We know that every moment we spend pouring over student work, reviewing a video of a lesson, and planning towards an upcoming key understanding or standard is done better with others. Through this collaborative work, we find joy. We find comradery. We establish, solidify, and refine our collective purpose.



Antiracism Means to Us...

Diversity: We value and intentionally invite the presence of multiple perspectives, backgrounds, orientations, and identities, with special attention toward staff members and leadership in our school whose identities are directly reflective of that of our students and families. We believe that work of justice invites all to participate and requires all to take part. And, we celebrate the strength we bring through acknowledging the vast differences in our backgrounds and experiences held by our differences in race, ethnicities, and communities of origin.

Inclusivity: We work to ensure diverse people, perspectives, backgrounds, and identities are actively made to feel safe within the environment of Believe. We intently listen to all voices to ensure all perspectives have been heard, knowing that we make the best decisions once we have considered all the perspectives. We believe that when people feel most safe, people operate at their best. We believe silence is a tool of oppression, and we value dissenting opinions rooted in common values as outlined in this document.

Equity: We acknowledge privilege as real, whether that be privileges afforded us by race, wealth, gender, sexuality, access to education, or otherwise. We work to eliminate disproportionate barriers placed on historically marginalized voices to cultivate an environment and culture in which diverse people, perspectives, backgrounds, and identities are heard and valued as equals. We believe that supports and development trajectories need to be tailored to individuals to both celebrate the unique, individual strengths that a person brings to this work, while honestly addressing the areas of growth necessary for us to be pushed to best fulfill the ambitious consequential, and necessary Mission of our School.

Justice: We take action to correct what we know is wrong. Wherever we see the absence of diversity, inclusivity, or equity, we take active measures to correct the injustice present that did not leave room for those values to thrive. The achievement gap is a predictable outcome to the injustice of segregation, inequitable housing, the wealth gap, the concentration of poverty, and traditional school boundaries following housing and neighborhood zones. We know that lack of school choice is a tool of oppression that perpetuates low-performing schools in economically disadvantaged communities of color. Our form of protest and act of justice is to provide a path-expanding education to children in currently untapped communities.

Antiracism: We acknowledge systemic racism is real and finds its roots in white supremacy. We recognize this when this country declared its independence in the 18th century, slavery was already institutionalized for more than 150 years and would continue for 100 more years following the writings of the Constitution. As such, the biases and oppressive tenants of white supremacy is deeply embedded into all systems, including public education, in this nation. Therefore, it is not enough to not be racist. We must take a position of antiracism, where we actively resist, uproot, and dismantle systemic racism in all forms. We start by evaluating the policies, procedures, practices, and language throughout our school to ensure they do not disproportionately hurt specific subgroups of children. We conduct autopsies of teaching taxonomies, philosophies, or methods that prove problematic, color-blind, or even oppressive and take courageous steps that celebrate and cultivate systems that promote diversity, equity, inclusivity, and justice within an antiracist framework. We ensure our curriculum is culturally responsive and full of opportunities for children to explore diverse traditions, cultures, and language.