



August 15, 2017

Dear CASEL friends:

Like so many of you, I've been shaken and horrified by the events of this past weekend in Charlottesville, Va. The prospect of overt and violent hatred and bigotry once again entering the American public square of ideas is abhorrent, and again, a very real threat.

I couldn't help being struck that so many of the participants in the violence were so young, like 20-year-old white supremacist James Alex Fields, Jr., who drove a car into a crowd of counter-protesters, injuring dozens and killing 32-year-old Heather Heyer. So much tragedy. . . a life cut short, and the living are left with pain, heartache, loss, and, for some, the inspiration for violence yet to come.

How could a society capable of nurturing so much beauty and compassion have also produced Mr. Fields? What forces stoked his fears of diversity and emboldened him with hate? How could his life have been different — not to mention the lives of hundreds of KKK members, alt-right supporters, white nationalists, and violent extremists — if he possessed the skills to understand and manage his emotions, feel empathy, and build positive relationships? We will never know.

I'm more convinced than ever that the work we do here at CASEL is part of the solution to this type of bigotry and fear. We believe in the power of education to teach nonviolence, promote understanding, endow children with purpose and meaning, and provide the skills and behaviors that can create a more inclusive, healthy, and positive future.

Our board chairman, Timothy Shriver, perfectly summed up what we must do to succeed when he said, "I want to change the cycle of stigma and prejudice that destroys lives all over the world every day. Until we can get in front of people and awaken them to the idea that this is not acceptable, it's very difficult for people to appreciate what we do and change the way we act as a society."

We are the educators who teach love over hate, the helpers who run toward disaster to comfort the afflicted, and the change agents who will help destroy prejudice and stigmatization.

I ask each of you not to disengage after the tragedy of this past weekend but instead to see it as a call to *redouble our efforts* because this work is vital, perhaps now more than ever. And we

must succeed. Our children are counting on us. Our communities are counting on us. Our country is counting on us.

Together we will build a better tomorrow!

Karen Niemi

President and CEO

CASEL: Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning