June 11, 2020

Dear Students, Parents, and Staff:

I am writing this letter to let everyone know the reasoning for keeping our United States National Anthem with an instrumental version and adding “Lift of Every Voice and Sing,” commonly referred to as the Black National Anthem to our Class of 2020 Graduation.

Our school is a public school within the Los Angeles Unified School District, which is within our city of Los Angeles, within our state of California, within the United States of America in which we all live. Our National Anthem is a patriotic musical composition that evokes and eulogizes the history, traditions and struggles of its people in this country. I stand in solidarity with our black community and it is time that we have difficult conversations about racism and in-equality in the United States.

There were students in the class of 2020 who requested to have the National Anthem taken out of our graduation ceremony. Two forums were held and a suggestion was made to include “Lift Every Voice and Sing”, commonly known as the Black National Anthem. The decision was made to include the instrumental version of The United States National Anthem and the vocal version of “Lift Every Voice and Sing.” Our National Anthem demonstrates the very freedom we have in our country of free speech and I respect your right to peacefully protest when you hear the National Anthem.

In addition, because of the student voices the staff has created a Sensitivity Committee that will focus on culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy and equitable practices for students. Also, we will continue to strengthen the work of the Black Student Union and welcome any members of the Class of 2020 to help support this work.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Principal, Ramon C. Cortines, Grand Arts School of Visual and Performing Arts