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## 'Hamilton' actor speaks to Moraga students about diversity and inclusion in the arts

By Jenn Freedman



Leslie Odom Jr. Photo provided

The Moraga Education Foundation (MEF) hosted an inspiring conversation Feb. 26 with Leslie Odom Jr., acclaimed actor and singer who played Aaron Burr in Broadway's "Hamilton" (and earned a Grammy Award and Tony Award for his role). Nearly 500 families tuned in to this virtual event where two Joaquin Moraga Intermediate School students, three Campolindo High School students, and faculty members from both schools talked with Odom about diversity and inclusion in the arts.

Student panelists were nominated by faculty members and chosen by the school administrators. They discussed topics such as mentors, the value in taking risks, tokenism, color-conscious casting/hiring, why the arts connect us, the impact of performing "Hamilton" in front of the first Black U.S. president, and more. Odom was humble during the discussion, asking the student panelists questions and letting them shine.

When asked by a student what they can do to make a difference, Odom said we should "start with our own corner of the world. Our homes, classrooms, teams, or bands. . It starts with the people who are in direct contact with you. .Whatever you want to see in the world, make sure you see in your own community."

Another message Odom shared that was profound for students and parents alike was the idea of do-overs, that we have the chance to do better for as long as we are alive. He also shared his favorite quote: "There is no failure, we either win or learn."

"We are so grateful to Leslie for sharing his time with our students - this was such an inspirational event," said Ana Moon, MEF vice president. The first 150 JM and Campo students to register were given a copy of Odom's book, "Failing Up," which was donated by an anonymous MEF donor.

To view the recording, go to <http://www.moragaeducation.org/videos>. To make a donation to MEF go to [www.moragaeducation.org/](http://www.moragaeducation.org/).

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