



THE SCHOOL DISTRICT OF  
PHILADELPHIA

## A Message from the Superintendent

Dear Colleagues,

It goes without saying that this has been an extremely painful week and a rather challenging few months for all of us.

As an African-American man, I am well too familiar with the frustration and hopelessness that many people have acted on over this past weekend. As a father, grandfather and educator, I am very aware of the trauma children may experience when they see reports of a black or brown person whose life seems to have little to no value. And, I can understand the fear that may come with seeing neighborhoods they know and love destroyed.

Our school communities are in mourning right now. And even though our buildings are not physically open, we remain here for our students, their families and each other. We are prepared to acknowledge the grief that many are feeling and encourage all educators to create opportunities for their respective communities to have discussions that speak to their emotions, fears, anxieties and needs.

It is in this vein that I am seeking your support. Just as our students are struggling to comprehend and respond to their emotions, so are many of us as adults. In some instances, the expressions of emotions and feelings have been racist and filled with hate. In other instances, individuals have been attacked and castigated for expressing a point of view. Racism or harassment of any sort is never okay -- we will aggressively investigate all reports of racist or discriminatory acts. Please report acts of discrimination or harassment to our Office of Employee and Labor Relations [HERE](#) or reach out to our Chief Talent Officer Larisa Shambaugh directly at [lshambaugh@philasd.org](mailto:lshambaugh@philasd.org).

As adults, we must all model the type of discourse that we want to see from our children.

Many of us may not know how to have these conversations and that is also okay. Nonetheless, it is important that we try. The district will continue to provide resources that can be used for these purposes.

We know full well that ignoring this matter will not make it go away. Perhaps shying away from these very difficult conversations has been a part of the problem all along. The actions that we've seen over the last few days are actions by individuals who are among our most vulnerable -- individuals who may feel as if their voices, their concerns, and their dreams don't matter. It is our intention to do more -- serve our students and empower them with information and resources that will prepare them to be active citizens of the world.

For those who are seeking guidance and wondering how to help, I have listed resources below.

Sincerely,



William R. Hite Jr., Ed.D.  
Superintendent  
The School District of Philadelphia

### **Tips for Facilitating Conversations About Racism and Discrimination:**

- Open with a breathing exercise or moment of silence. If you are comfortable, read the names of the victims of violence we have seen from at least the last few years.
- Offer your school norms or use the norms from the book, *Courageous Conversations About Race*:
  - **Stay engaged:** Staying engaged means “remaining morally, emotionally, intellectually, and socially involved in the dialogue.”
  - **Experience discomfort:** This norm acknowledges that discomfort is inevitable, especially, in dialogue about race, and that participants make a commitment to bring issues into the open. It is not talking about these issues that create divisiveness. The divisiveness already exists in the society and in our schools. It is through dialogue, even when uncomfortable, the healing and change begin.
  - **Speak your truth:** This means being open about thoughts and feelings and not just saying what you think others want to hear.
  - **Expect and accept non closure:** This agreement asks participants to “hangout in uncertainty” and not rush to quick solutions, especially in relation to racial understanding, which requires ongoing dialogue.
- Model Vulnerability - Share your own experience of how you are feeling and processing these events.
- Acknowledge that this affects people of color differently. More specifically:
  - Request that colleagues who are not people of color come with an open heart and mind to LISTEN and LEARN - not question, play devil's advocate or seek validation, as this can cause undue trauma and emotional burden for people of color.
- Encourage people to share self care tips.
- State that racism, bias, and anti-blackness are very real and baked into our systems - from education, housing, health care, and labor practices. If necessary build shared understanding around definitions: (Adapted from Glenn E. Singleton & Curtis Linton, *Courageous Conversations about Race: A Field Guide for Achieving Equity in Schools*. 2006. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin):
  - Race: A socially constructed characterization of individuals based on skin color,

- culture, etc.
  - Racism: Any act that even unwittingly tolerates, accepts or reinforces racially unequal opportunities or outcomes for children to learn and thrive.
  - Privilege: A right or advantage that is given to some people and not others.
  - “Whiteness”: The component of each and every one of ourselves that expects assimilation to the dominant culture.
- As always, connect it to students: What does this mean for our most vulnerable students; those with the most marginalized identities?

### **Additional Resources for Adults:**

- [An Antiracist Reading List](#)
- White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism by Robin DiAngelo. [Wikipedia](#)
- How to be Antiracist by Ibram X. Kendi
- Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria by Beverly Tatum
- Eloquent Rage by Brittany Cooper
- The Breakdown by Shawn King (podcast)
- The New Jim Crow by Michelle Alexander
- [https://docs.google.com/document/d/1HuV02BhF6zA0m00knWZ\\_BMQ-UspU1ZkJU0FoMrue1X4/edit?ts=5ed805cb](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1HuV02BhF6zA0m00knWZ_BMQ-UspU1ZkJU0FoMrue1X4/edit?ts=5ed805cb)

### **Tips for Talking to Your Children About Race:**

- <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/family/in-the-news/talking-about-race/>
- <https://www.parenttoolkit.com/social-and-emotional-development/advice/social-awareness/how-to-talk-to-kids-about-race-and-racism>
- <https://www.npr.org/2019/04/24/716700866/talking-race-with-young-children>

### **Reading for Children:**

- <https://ncte.org/blog/2020/05/build-stack-affirming-black-boys-outside-context-police-brutality/?fbclid=IwAR0AEY5vIEzBX8Jck3IuBifVdcxJM2KgBXtNbSHOD1JkNhgdqN4CA44cCGk>
- <https://www.embracerace.org/resources/26-childrens-books-to-support-conversations-on-race-racism-resistance>