

June 3, 2020

Dear Families,

It is hard to recall another time as gut-wrenching and heartbreaking as these recent days have been. George Floyd's murder at the hands of police officers last week was horrifying. I am sickened. But, like many of you, I am not surprised. We have seen this abominable disregard for Black lives so many times before, including multiple times in recent weeks. It is truly agonizing to witness; it is nothing short of another pandemic presenting itself on the streets of America.

The New York City Department of Education condemns police brutality and this brutal loss of life. My heart breaks to know that yet another Black family has lost a son, a father, a brother. I stand in solidarity with Black New Yorkers and Americans, and with everyone who is mourning yet another senseless loss. Pain ripples and resonates across communities all over the City. I am with all of you as we individually and collectively reckon with this tragic injustice. The demonstrations happening in the five boroughs and in nearly 140 cities across the country are a reflection of this anguish, and the desire for a better world.

It is incredibly difficult to be a parent or caregiver right now: grappling with emotions, seeking actions that both feel of service and of the magnitude needed in this moment, and thinking through ways to begin or deepen conversations with children and families about recent horrific incidents and the systemic racism from which they spring—all at the same time. The pain and struggle are very real.

For communities of color, nothing about this pain is new. It's been in the bodies, minds, and hearts of millions of New Yorkers and Americans for generations—because racist violence has been perpetrated for that long.

Racism also causes new harm in other ways, every day, because it is systemic—woven deeply into the fabric of our institutions, our economy, and the systems that make up our shared community. That is true in New York City, as progressive and forward-thinking as we are, including in our public school system.

At the DOE we have said, and we will continue to say: no more.

We must answer the call to be actively anti-racist and work every day to undo these systems of injustice. We will continue in our resolve to advance equity now. We will honor the dignity and humanity of every student, parent, educator, employee and member of our community every day.

No matter the form teaching and learning takes—in brick-and-mortar classrooms or on a digital device—the goal remains the same: providing an excellent education to every single student. In doing so, we must also continually find ways to dismantle institutional racism and reverse its effects.

That work is underway. It includes implementing restorative practices, training all educators and employees on implicit bias, providing mental health supports to school communities, and more. This work creates a lifelong effect in children and has the potential to transform our society in ways that make that the world safer, more just, and better for everyone.

When, for example, children learn from books featuring protagonists and lessons featuring stories from people of different races, abilities, genders, ethnicities, languages, and more, they learn also to value difference and diversity. When students experiencing anger or resentment are taught healthy ways to communicate, it's more likely they won't react out of unfounded fear.

We will not relent in the work to intensify equity until, student by student and school by school, change comes. We all need this, because racism doesn't just harm Black, Brown, or Asian families—it harms us all.



Everyone has a role to play. In addition to continuing our work centrally, we are supporting educators with resources to teach episodes from our history and our present, episodes where these same shudders of injustice and outrage, peaceful protest, and also violence and destruction have ripped through our city and society.

At the same time, many of you have already been doing this work at home or are otherwise putting personal resources into these efforts—your time, your energy, your heart, or your voice. We see you, and we are grateful for your powerful commitment. Children see and feel the world around them, and now is an important time to guide them in understanding and engaging with their experiences and those of their friends, families, and fellow New Yorkers.

Below you will find resources to help start, continue, or deepen conversations with children about racism and injustice. We are also sharing resources to help with stress, exhaustion, and self-care. As parents and caregivers, caring for yourself is essential in order to be able to care for others. We will continue to update resources as we move ahead, and you can find them at schools.nyc.gov/togetherforjustice

I have been reminded of this quote by the writer James Baldwin that resonates so powerfully in this moment: “Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced.” These are difficult days of reckoning, but we have the opportunity—and a calling—to go farther in facing injustice.

You are our most important partners in the education of the children of New York City and the building of a better world. We are grateful for you today and every day.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Richard A. Carranza'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, stylized initial 'R'.

Richard A. Carranza
Chancellor
New York City Department of Education

Resources to talk to your children about race and current events:

- [Guidance for Family Conversations about George Floyd, Racism, and Law Enforcement](#) (Anti-Defamation League)
- [Talking to Kids About Racism, Early and Often](#) (New York Times)
- [31 Children's books](#) to support conversations on race, racism and resistance (Embracerace)
- [Black Lives Matter Still Matters](#) (Teaching Tolerance)
- [Talking about Race for Parents & Caregivers](#) (National Museum of African American History & Culture)
- [Coming Together, Standing Up to Racism](#) (Sesame Street)

Mental Health Resources to address stress and trauma:

- [Managing Strong Emotional Reactions to Trauma](#) (National Association of School Psychologists)
- [Radical Self Care in the Face of Mounting Racial Stress](#) (American Psychological Association)

Free Mental Health Support:

NYC Well For Staff, students and parents

- Call: 1-888-NYC-WELL (1-888-692-9355)
- Text: WELL to 65173
- Chat: at <https://nycwell.cityofnewyork.us/en/>

We will continue to update resources at schools.nyc.gov/togetherforjustice