



The Michigan Teacher of the Year Network stands united in support of protests designed to call attention to the evils of institutional racism and the lasting harm it perpetuates on everyone in our country.

As educators, we have been appalled at the murders of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd by police. The image of Derek Chauvin kneeling on Floyd's neck shows nothing short of a lynching. These cases are emblematic of 400 years of intergenerational trauma. There are countless other manifestations of racism from microaggressions to death that African Americans all over the country have always been subject to simply by being Black.

All people should be called to forge a new future. We must begin by adopting an anti-racist stance. This starts with a willingness to be quiet and listen to African-Americans without judgment. The lived experience of Black people in the United States is inherently different from that of all other groups of people. Furthermore, it is not enough for a white person to declare that they are not a racist. Rather, existing systems must be challenged and reinvented to promote equitable access to services and an equitable distribution of resources.

The school-to-prison pipeline must be dismantled. This includes the presence of police officers in schools. We must address the overrepresentation of African-American males in special education and the scarcity of African-Americans in AP, honors, and STEM classes. We must successfully recruit, mentor, and support more African American teachers.

We urge school boards and the Michigan Department of Education to present a five-year plan to the communities they serve that includes a more inclusive curriculum, culturally responsive training for all educators and staff, community conversations on race and lived experiences, and the dismantling of systemic obstacles for all students, specifically those who are BIPOC.

As educators, we appreciate the fact that we have tremendous power in helping craft conversations that may be life-altering for students. Now more than ever, we have an obligation to reinvent our systems to ensure that they serve all students.

The impetus for change has never been greater. The best way to honor the memory of those who are killed by virtue of their skin color is to rededicate ourselves to dismantling racist systems that continue to marginalize and oppress Black people. It is so long past time.

In Solidarity,

The Leadership Team - MTOY Network

Melody Arabo, MTOY 2015

Rick Joseph, MTOY 2016

Matinga Ragatz, MTOY 2011

June Teisan, MTOY 2008

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