

Addressing Racism in the Sac City Unified Community

Sac City Unified Provides Racial and Social Justice Supports and Resources

June 4, 2020

Our community is in terrible pain. On top of closing out a very difficult year due to COVID-19, many of our community members are fighting for their lives. They are out of work and homes, face economic collapse, and the mental fatigue of a lifetime encountering systemic racism and violence.

Recent racist acts of violence against Black and Brown people follow centuries of oppression. The unrest in our community requires a much more intentional conversation about the implications of systemic racism and the collective actions necessary to move toward real healing. Just as COVID-19 has had a disparate impact on our community, the countless acts of racism and subsequent unrest have layered on additional trauma to our students, families, and staff.

Confronting Injustice

It is our responsibility as a community to recognize our own role in this trauma — as difficult and uncomfortable as it may be. While we might not ever truly break down the injustices that we, as a society, have thrust onto communities of color, we must listen, reflect, and attempt to correct inequities. We cannot stop at mere acknowledgement of these brutal injustices through public statements alone.

May 31 Statement by Superintendent Jorge Aguilar on the murder of George Floyd: “Our community, and my family, grieves over the killing of George Floyd. Anger, despair, frustration, fear, and hopelessness are valid feelings. We are in pain. Racism is part of the current design of our systems, from our schools to our prisons to our neighborhoods. And each of us is responsible for breaking down this injustice against our black community. Today we grieve, protest, demand change – tomorrow we take appropriate and unrelenting action to bring justice. I ask our community, especially our youth, to demonstrate peacefully and to exert energy through civic action – participate, vote, make your voice heard by disrupting inequities each and

every day. But the responsibility doesn't fall on you alone. We need honest and frank conversations, from every level of government and to hold those standing silently to account."

Examining Our Role

In the case of Sac City Unified, that means looking in the mirror and taking an honest stock of our own role, including implicit and explicit biases, and examples – both past and present – of institutional racism.

In February 2018, the Greater Sacramento NAACP commissioned a report, [*The Capitol of Suspensions: Examining the Racial Exclusion of Black Males in Sacramento County, by J. Luke Wood, Ph.D.; Frank Harris III, Ph.D.; and Tyrone Howard, Ph.D.*](#) The report highlighted the high suspension of Black boys and young men in Sacramento County public schools, finding:

- Black males are 5.4 times more likely to be suspended in Sacramento County than the statewide average;
- Nearly 18 Black males were suspended, per day, in the county;
- Sacramento County has four school districts – including SCUSD – in the top 20 suspension districts for Black males in the state;
- Sac City Unified is the most egregious suspension district for Black males in the State of California;
- Black males in early childhood education are 9.9 times more likely to be suspended than peers; and
- One third of all Black male foster youth are suspended in Sacramento County.

Suspension removes our students from their educational journey. Our district — as seen by these statistics — has overly relied on suspension as a form of discipline, especially when it comes to our male students of color. This must become as unacceptable to us as police violence and other forms of racism are. As [Board President Ryan reflected in her June 2018 Opinion Editorial](#) we must deeply reflect on how we can address these issues, both personally and as educators.

How We Are Addressing Institutional Racism

We may not have all the answers to dismantling institutional racism, but we are committed to being a part of the solutions. This means engaging in courageous conversations and addressing racism from every angle so that we can protect our students and advance our vision of equity, access, and social justice.

This will take continued effort and coordination with a number of community partners, they are the warriors on the ground with deep connection to our families, including our own Sac City Unified African American Achievement Task Force — which was developed to support our African American students in reaching their full potential. As educators and leaders in our community, we have a moral imperative to change outcomes for African American students on a variety of key district student outcomes, including grade level readiness, graduation, A-G completion, and college and career readiness measurements. The District has undertaken a number of critical steps to confront inequities for students, particularly with respect to academic and discipline related outcomes of our Black students, including supporting a [statewide effort \(SB 419, Skinner 2019\)](#) to end willful defiance as a catch-all for suspension.

Sac City Unified has adopted a Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS), designed to strengthen efforts to address academic, behavioral, and social and emotional learning. ***This MTSS system is aligned with our vision of restorative practices which would help shift “discipline paradigms from reactive to restoratively practice”*** (CDE) and help Sac City Unified manage institutional racism and reliance on suspension as a form of correction.

Our district has established working relationships with community-based organizations that have interest in addressing deeply-rooted issues in Sacramento related to race and culture to help us work with labor partners to make this vision a reality.

Courageous Conversations

These conversations are not easy, and they should not be. Admitting mistakes, missteps, and biases takes humility. Topics of racism, social justice and equity are complex, difficult, and uncomfortable. But we have to commit to continuing these conversations. We owe it to our community, our students, and ourselves.

May 31 Statement by President Jessie Ryan on the murder of George Floyd: “Almost every day our Black community is retraumatized by another name being added to a heartbreaking list of racist killings. Now, amidst the COVID crisis, many of our young Black boys and girls are being forced to process this pain in isolation. It is almost too much to bear. As a Mother and Oak Park community member, there are no words that offer sufficient healing. The pain and trauma our children and community are experiencing defies all logic. What we must do is stand together to demand justice, discuss racism

and intolerance openly with our children, and understand and take action against the triggers that have pushed our community to the edge.”

Sac City Unified has made available resources for educators and families to discuss and address racism and trauma at www.scusd.edu/race-and-social-justice.