

Black Lives Matter in School Background Information and Teacher Guide

Background

Seattle Public Schools serves approximately 55,000 students that are diverse in every way. One of the biggest issues of our time is the unacceptable educational disparities between white and African American students in the district. Educators, families, community members and students across the city share a commitment to eliminate this inequity and to ensure that all students achieve greatness in every way. The first week of February, educators across the country are marking “Black Lives Matter in School” to take a stand for social justice. A partnership of Seattle Public Schools Ethnic Studies Working Group, the Seattle Education Association’s Center for Race and Equity, and representatives of the Seattle-King County NAACP is proud to offer five lessons to help their students understand the issues that matter to the lives of African American students.

Goals and Purpose

Overall, the Black Lives Matter in School lessons aim to:

- Reflect the lived experiences of students, families, and friends
- Help students understand inequities based on race
- Affirm that the lives of people of color matter
- Promotes the belief that we all have a responsibility to work for equity as a core ideal

Policies Affirm Equity

Seattle Public Schools has clear policies affirming equity and opposing any form of discrimination. Policy 0030, Ensuring Educational and Racial Equity commits our district to “Eliminate the racial predictability and disproportionality in all aspects of education and its administration”. It is in this spirit that the lessons are presented for teacher use.

Themes of the Lessons

This year, educators from many cities are observing a Nationwide Black Lives Matter Week of Action in Schools. The Seattle Education Association has endorsed the event. In their announcement, the SEA cites [TeachingforChange.org](https://teachingforchange.org), in pointing out “the goal of Black Lives Matter Week of Action in Schools is to spark an ongoing movement of critical reflection and honest conversation in school communities for people of all ages to engage with critical issues of racial justice.” There are three imperatives that will be covered throughout the week:

- End Zero Tolerance
- Hire Black Teachers
- Mandate Black History/Ethnic Studies

Each day’s lesson covers a theme of equity and justice in the Black community. There are elementary, middle and high school level lessons. The lesson outline was developed by The Caucus of Working Educators from the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers:

Monday: The Day of Demands, including Restorative Justice, Empathy, Loving Engagement

Restorative Justice is the commitment to build a beloved and loving community that is sustainable and growing. **Empathy** is one’s ability to connect with others by building relationships built on mutual trust and understanding. **Loving Engagement** is the commitment to practice justice, liberation and peace.

Tuesday: Diversity, Globalism

Diversity is the celebration and acknowledgment of differences and commonalities across cultures. **Globalism** is our ability to see how we are impacted or privileged within the Black global family that exists across the world in different regions.

Wednesday: Trans-Affirming, Queer Affirming, & Collective Value

Transgender Affirming is the commitment to continue to make space for our trans brothers and sisters by encouraging leadership and recognizing trans-antagonistic violence. **Queer Affirming** is working towards a queer-affirming network where heteronormative thinking no longer exists. **Collective Value** means that all Black lives, regardless of actual or perceived sexual identity, gender identity, gender expression, economic status, ability, disability, religious beliefs or disbeliefs, immigration status or location matter.

Thursday: Intergenerational, Black Families, & Black Villages

Intergenerational is a space free from ageism where we can learn from each other. **Black Families** creates a space that is family friendly and free from patriarchal practices. **Black Villages** is the disruption of Western nuclear family dynamics and a return to the “collective village” that takes care of each other.

Friday: Black Women, Unapologetically Black

Black Women is the building of women-centered spaces free from sexism, misogyny, and male centeredness. **Unapologetically Black** is the affirmation that Black Lives Matter and that our love, and desire for justice and freedom are prerequisites for wanting that for others. These principles are the blueprint for healing and do not include nor do they support ignoring or sanitizing the ugliness and discomfort that comes with dealing with race and anti-race issues.

Ensuring Academic Freedom while Teaching Controversial Subjects

Teaching about social justice in our current political climate is not always easy, even if it is in the interest of historically underserved students. However, educators in the U.S. have the right to teach and discuss about issues that are a part of civil life in society, including racism and equity.

Both district policy and procedure, and the Seattle Education Association bargaining agreement clarify that teachers have academic freedom to have these conversations; “The instructional program shall respect the right of students to face issues, to have free access to information, to study under educators in situations free from prejudice and to form, hold, and express their own opinions without personal prejudice or discrimination...The district encourages staff members to provide for the free and orderly flow and examination of ideas...” (Superintendent Procedure 2331).

A key practice that protects both teacher and student is, while discussing societal issues, to avoid any appearance of the imposition of views and opinions on students. This can be done by acknowledging an opposing view, clearly identifying a teacher’s opinion as just that, and presenting factual information. While acknowledging an opposing view, if a lesson is on an equity theme, it does not mean that equal time must be given to views in opposition to equity. The contrasting views instead should be used to provide for full information for students.

An accompanying document, “Controversial Issues in the Classroom” helps to provide guidance to teachers. As well, there are other resources on how to conduct conversations on highly complex issues.

- Discussion-Based Teaching and Handling Controversial Topics in the Classroom—Center for Research on Learning and Teaching <http://www.crlt.umich.edu/tstrategies/tsd>
- Guidelines for Discussing Incidents of Hate, Bias, and Discrimination—Center for Research on Learning and Teaching <http://www.crlt.umich.edu/publinks/respondingtobias>
- Controversial Subjects in the Classroom—Teaching Tolerance <http://www.tolerance.org/article/controversial-subjects-classroom>

Other resources can be found on the Seattle Education Association Center for Race and Equity website.