

ConnectEd Update (August 16, 2020)

Good Afternoon Rocky Middle School Community,

I am resending this important message that was sent at the beginning of June to our community. Since we are welcoming new community members, I wanted to share this again.

Good afternoon RHMS community,

I am writing to you after the murder of George Floyd to reach out to our community and share my thoughts as a principal. We cannot be silent in the face of racism--this is a human issue, not a black issue. We cannot turn away. I invite, no, implore our community to join me to support people of color facing racism every day.

I want to share with our RHMS community the message I sent to our RHMS staff (see below) so we can impact change. We are a **No Place for Hate** school and need to put our words into action in everyday anti-racist practices. I understand some community members may feel uncomfortable talking about race and I have included learning resources (see last section of message) - we must get comfortable with being uncomfortable so we can make a change. Our children are watching and listening and we cannot be silent.

Dr. Eldridge

I have been feeling many emotions after the murder of George Floyd and have been trying to find the right words. There are no "right words" except- I stand with people of color for immediate change. The murder of George Floyd. How can someone murder another human being? This is not an African American issue—this is an American issue. This is a humanity issue that concerns all of us.

How do our black students feel after another death? While we struggle to find the words to express our sadness, anger and frustration, one thing is certain: silence is not an option. In this moment, it is also important to ensure that all students, families and staff of color feel safe and heard after these racist acts.

The racial trauma our students, and people of color in our school & community, feel is deep. This is trauma that no white person in American can fathom—we can empathize, learn and support. It is deep trauma that is generational from slavery, oppression and a long-standing hate of those of color in America.

- Listen when people of color are sharing their experiences.

- Listen to understand, not reply.
- Speak out that this is a human issue, not a black issue.

What can we do? Do not be silent. This is a resource from *Teaching for Tolerance*:

- **INTERRUPT** speak up against every biased remark—in the moment, each time. Think about what you will say ahead of time so you’re prepared to respond. Try saying, “ I don’t like words like that- those words are hurtful and I don’t support what you said.”
- **QUESTION** ask simple questions in response to hateful remarks to find out why the person made the offensive comment and how you can best address the situation. Try asking, “Why do you say that? What do you mean? Or Tell me more about what you said.”
- **EDUCATE** explain why a term or phrase is offensive. Hate isn’t behind all hateful speech. Sometimes ignorance is at work or a lack of exposure to a diverse population. Try saying, “Do you know the history of that word? What do you mean?”
- **ECHO** If someone else speaks up against hate, thank her and reiterate her anti-bias message. One person’s voice is a powerful start. Many voices together create change. Try saying, “Thank you for speaking up. I agree that word is hurtful and offensive and we shouldn’t use it.”

As we are a **NO PLACE FOR HATE** school: below are a few resources to guide educators as they are faced with questions and concerns from students. Now more than ever we must unite and stand together against racism. These resources will also be shared with parents.

ADL Resources:

- [**Table Talk: George Floyd, Racism and Law Enforcement**](#) helps family members engage in a discussion about the killing of George Floyd, how bias and hate escalate and the larger context of systemic racism.
- [**Lesson Plan: Black Lives Matter: From Hashtag to Movement**](#) provides an opportunity for students to learn more about Black Lives Matter and the activists involved.
- [**Theme Collection: Teaching about Racism, Violence, Inequity and the Criminal Justice System**](#) is a curation of educational resources and strategies to help you discuss with youth incidents of police officers involved in the deaths of African-American and Latino boys and men and a biased justice system.

Dr. Eldridge

How you open the door to conversation with your teenager?

Watch the [**Table Talk: George Floyd, Racism and Law Enforcement**](#) to help family members engage in a discussion about the killing of George Floyd, how bias and hate escalate and the larger context of systemic racism.

Talk together about:

- How does this make you feel?
- What questions are coming up as a result of experiences and the video?
- How is this story similar or different from my own experience?
- If this is different than our family experience then how do we learn more?

Since knowing that we must speak with our children about racism is different sometimes from knowing how to start that conversation. We have a list from the MCPS equity team of ideas and resources for parents and children of all backgrounds and ages.

Resources to Enter the Conversation on Race and Culture with Your Children

All these resources can be found at <http://bit.ly/mcpsEQUITY>

How to Talk to Kids about Race and Racism (<http://bit.ly/2OMtVfu>)

“In short? There’s no “one way” to dive into this topic. There’s no such thing as “quick tips” or foolproof advice when it comes to discussing the complexities of race. But, there are better ways to go about it and each parent will have to decide for themselves what makes the most sense for them and their family. Above all, it’s a conversation *all* parents need to have, no matter your background or experience. So, if you’re curious how to get this conversation started, here’s what the experts have to say.”

Being 12 Video (<http://bit.ly/31Ofug5>)

Middle School students talk about the experiences they have around their racial and cultural identities. This is a good video to watch with your child to start a conversation.

Danger of a Single Story (<http://bit.ly/31Z85dR>)

Our lives, our cultures, are composed of many overlapping stories. Novelist Chimamanda Adichie tells the story of how she found her authentic cultural voice -- and warns that if we hear only a single story about another person or country, we risk a critical misunderstanding.

How to Raise a Black Son in America (<https://bit.ly/36LB7Ac>)

As kids, we all get advice from parents and teachers that seems strange, even confusing. This was crystallized one night for a young Clint Smith, who was playing with water guns in a dark

parking lot with his white friends. In a heartfelt piece, the poet paints the scene of his father's furious and fearful response.

[Essays from MCPS Students and Staff \(http://bit.ly/2SjQ86B\)](http://bit.ly/2SjQ86B)

A series of short essays written by Montgomery County students and staff about their identity. These are great conversation starters to engage in conversations with your children and friends.

- [Nicaragua in Our Hearts and Minds](#)
- [What Learning to Speak Arabic in America Taught Me About Being Arab American](#)
- [A Student's Experience Being Gay in MCPS](#)
- [Wes--A Tale of American Studies](#)
- [Journey North](#)
- [The Gap is in My Bones](#)

[Books, Podcasts and Articles \(http://bit.ly/33bMpLS\)](http://bit.ly/33bMpLS)

Recommendations from the MCPS Equity Initiatives Staff on books, podcasts, and articles that help expand our understanding of different cultures. These are mostly for adults, but some can be read with middle schoolers.

Television Shows to Watch with Middle Schoolers

Sometimes the best way to engage students to learn about different cultures or discuss important issues is by watching TV together. There are many programs that expose viewers to different cultures while also providing a safe way to discuss social issues. Below are some light hearted programs that staff in the Equity Initiatives Unit enjoy. The descriptions come from Common Sense Media (<https://www.common sense media.org/>)

Mr. Kim's Convenience -- *Kim's Convenience* is a popular Canadian series that revolves around a Korean Canadian family and uses this premise to address issues like racial profiling, discrimination, and other social issues.

One Day at a Time -- This Netflix-original comedy-drama is inspired by Norman Lear's 1975 series of the same name. This time around, the series follows the life of Penelope, a newly single Army veteran, and her Cuban-American family, as they navigate the ups and downs of life. The series offers a contemporary take on what life looks like in both good and bad times, and how loved ones can help make it all worthwhile.

Black-ish -- *Black-ish* is a sitcom about a father who worries that his African-American family is assimilating too much into its wealthy homogenous community. Watch with kids and discuss the many issues the show brings up.

Hasan Learns What It's Like to Grow Up Desi In 2019 | Patriot Act with Hasan Minhaj. -
- Comedian Hasan Minhaj talks with South Asian American teenagers about what it's like to grow up in the United States.