



August 23, 2017

Dear Colleagues,

Schools are safe havens for communities and must be free from discrimination and intolerance of any kind. The hateful discourse and violence that occurred during the recent white supremacist rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, has shaken all of us, and left some straining to make sense of the turmoil gripping our nation. As we continue to process the deeply troubling events in Virginia, I want to be clear: there is no place for racism, hate, or intolerance in New York City public schools.

First and foremost, we must ensure that our classrooms and schools remain safe, inclusive and nurturing spaces for all students, staff, and families. It is our job as leaders to stay focused on the goal of education: to create thoughtful, productive citizens who understand the value of living in a diverse, accepting society.

With the new school year approaching, I am asking superintendents and Field Support Center leaders to work with the principals in their districts on how to have thoughtful conversations with students and staff. We cannot avoid these conversations just because they are difficult. In fact, we have a moral imperative to talk about bigotry and the reasons some people may be antagonistic toward others.

As principals and teachers prepare for these discussions, ask them to incorporate student voice and meaningful dialogue. Give students an opportunity to share what it means to be, for example, African American, Latino, Jewish, Muslim, female, or LGBTQ in our country. Students can also discuss what discrimination might look like in a school, and the positive actions they can take to promote diversity. Consider having a Student Council-led discussion around this topic and encourage students to share their feelings and concerns. Designate a safe place within the school where students can go if they are anxious or upset, as so many of us are, by the hate and violence in our society.

When school leaders, teachers, and parents have these conversations, we all become role models for our students. Our students, in turn, can model inclusive behavior for their peers or the younger students in their schools. Mentorships and strong student advisories can ensure all students feel supported and know where to seek help, or simply find someone who will listen. Extending these discussions to parents is also an important part of the process; this is not just a school issue but a community issue as well.

To help educators plan relevant lessons, the DOE has prepared a list of [resources](#). The document includes a link to the *NYC K-8 Passport to Social Studies Curriculum*, with unit guides on such topics as the Civil War, Confederate memorials, and Reconstruction. On Election Day, we will offer professional learning opportunities on anti-bias education, social justice, and diversity.

Make no mistake: these are not partisan topics. The point of these conversations is to build bridges, not barriers. Most importantly, when children come from a place of respect and honesty, they embody the best of what it means to be a New Yorker, and the rest of us rise with them.

Through words and actions, we must all make it clear that there is no place for racism and hateful rhetoric in our city, and certainly not in our schools.

Sincerely,

Carmen