

Dear DOE Family,

The past few days have been gut-wrenching and heartbreaking as another pandemic, beyond COVID-19, presents itself again on the streets of America. The murder of George Floyd at the hands of police officers last week was horrifying to me, as I am sure it was to so many of you. I feel sickened, but not surprised. We have seen this abominable disregard for Black lives so many times before, including multiple times in recent weeks. It is truly agonizing to witness.

The New York City Department of Education condemns police brutality and this brutal loss of life. My heart breaks to know that yet another Black family has lost a son, a father, a sibling. I stand in solidarity with DOE's Black employees, and with all Black New Yorkers and Americans, who are mourning yet another senseless loss. Pain of course also resonates in the broader DOE community, and I am with all of you as we individually and collectively reckon with this tragic injustice.

The demonstrations happening in our city and in nearly 140 cities across the country are a reflection of this anguish, and the desire for a better world. We are distraught. We are seeking actions that feel of service and rise to this moment. Many of us are also parents talking with our children and families about recent horrific incidents and the systemic racism from which they spring. The pain and struggle of this moment is very real.

For generations of Black Americans, nothing about this pain is new. It's been in the bodies, minds, and hearts of millions of New Yorkers and Americans for generations—because racist violence has been occurring for that long.

But racism also causes new harm in other ways, every day, because it is systemic—woven deeply into the fabric of our institutions, our economy, and the systems that make up our shared community. That is true in New York City, as progressive and forward-thinking as we are, including in our public school system.

But together we have said, and we will continue to say: no more. We must answer the call to be antiracist, and work every day to undo these systems. We will continue in our resolve to advance equity now. We will honor the dignity and humanity of every student, family, and educator every day.

The reality is that as proud public servants in service of New York City public school students, we are by definition part of the effort to fight injustice. It is our duty to serve everyone. And it is up to us to act.

We must act in a conscious and culturally responsive way that recognizes that bias of all kinds has left some students and schools with greater need than their peers—and farther away from the level of opportunity they deserve.

And that's where you come in.

You are the ones making opportunity real for our children.

You are creating the instruction, the tools, the experiences, and the supports that turn equity from a concept into a practice for 1.1 million young people.

You are working to address and reverse the effects of systemic racism and bias by providing an excellent education.

You are advancing tools to implement restorative practices, training educators on implicit bias, providing mental health supports to school communities, and more.

And I am here to work shoulder to shoulder with you, championing and charting the path for this work every step of the way. As Chancellor, it is my responsibility to invest in, lead, and support you, and I commit to striving for equity alongside you.

Fewer things could be more important. This work has a lifelong effect on children, and the potential to transform our society in ways that make that society safer, more just, and better for everyone. When, for example, children learn from books featuring protagonists and lessons featuring stories from people of different races, abilities, genders, ethnicities, languages, and more, they learn also to value difference and diversity. When students experiencing anger or resentment are taught healthy ways to communicate, it's more likely they won't react out of unfounded fear.

These are real life lessons for our kids and work that benefits all of us. To be clear, systemic racism doesn't just harm Black, Brown, or Asian families. It harms us all. That is why we must double down on our work for equity and evolution so that student by student and school by school, change comes.

This is what being a public servant means. It means designing instruction so that all students can access and engage in work that challenges and excites them. It means valuing social emotional learning and seeking out resources for the support kids need—knowing that it is different for each child. It means honoring parent voices in every community, and really taking the time to listen. We can forge a path forward together through these difficult times, in a way that continues to dismantle institutional racism and advance equity now.

I went into education because I wanted to be part of this work, and I know many of you did too. Now is the time when we must take care of ourselves, our families, our communities, and renew our commitment to our children. They need us now more than ever.

I am asking you to continue to urge students and colleagues to safely express their experiences and opinions, and share their vision for a better world. We will make sure educators have access to resources to teach episodes from our history and our present, episodes where these same shudders of injustice and outrage, peaceful protest, and also violence and destruction

have ripped through our city and society. We are sharing some of these resources [here](#), and we will continue to update and post more in the coming days.

Please take the time you need to care for yourself. Know we are here for you in this moment. It is imperative to commit to this work through self-care and learning. We all have a part to play in building an anti-racist society. I know many of you are also putting personal resources into these efforts—your time, your energy, your heart. I see you and applaud your powerful commitment to this work.

One of your colleagues shared a quote with me from the writer James Baldwin that resonates so powerfully in this moment: “Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced.”

These are difficult days of reckoning, but we have the opportunity—and a calling—to go farther in facing injustice. We must answer this calling together. It is our shared duty to reimagine an intersectional world and make a conscious, sustained commitment to build an anti-racist education system that serves all children. I commit to working with each of you in this.

I am so proud to be of service alongside you. Thank you for your resilience and leadership, today and always.

In Unity,

Richard