

# **Anti-racism Statement**

## **Purpose**

It is impossible to deny the unrest, upheaval, and tragedies that have recently occurred in our nation. As we reflect and mourn, it brings a sense of urgency to our responsibility to actively work toward dismantling racism and the systems that diminish our collective striving for equity, justice, and peace for all.

As the late John Lewis said, “When you see something that is not right, not fair, not just, you have to speak up. You have to say something; you have to do something.” Times like these evoke a healthy sense of anger and unrest but perhaps, more meaningfully, serve as a call for the sustained and necessary work that needs to be done.

During this time of global pandemic, when we are isolated and disconnected from each other physically, we must reimagine what coming back together as a community will be like. It is our belief that we need to invest in coming back together stronger, more informed, more compassionate, and more committed to building a just, safe, and equitable society for all.

## **Belief Statement**

As a school whose guiding principles are respect and responsibility, and whose mission is to help ensure that future generations are prepared to live lives with meaning, dignity and the ability to work together for a better world, we acknowledge that painful racial inequities and injustices exist and persist in our country. We believe that working for a better world includes taking action to ensure that all Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) are treated with human dignity and have equitable access to opportunity, safety, and education. In recognition of this, we commit to examining ourselves and striving to be anti-racist. We commit to being allies in co-creating a culture in which differences and commonalities are honored and celebrated. We will strive to create a community in which every person feels seen, heard, and supported.

## **Action**

According to the Ontario Anti-Racism Secretariat, anti-racism is the practice of identifying, challenging, and changing the values, structures and behaviors that perpetuate systemic racism. We recognize that committing ourselves to anti-racist work means first acknowledging that we have a lot to learn. We realize that our learning must be active and ongoing. Anti-racist work must not be the focus of one unit of study, one particular grade level, or one school year. It is work that must be sustained, revisited and revised as we continue to learn more about how to be more inclusive and equitable in our approach to education and, by extension, our school policies. To this end, we will continue seeking, and participating in, professional development focused on what it means to be anti-racist educators.

As learners, we know that we must first take time to listen and hear the concerns of people who have often been silenced and marginalized. We need to seek out the voices and varied viewpoints of BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) so that we can create a school environment in which people feel safe, welcome, and represented.

We must commit to educating ourselves in order to avoid exhibiting microaggressions, or engaging in cultural appropriation, so we do not, through ignorance, inadvertently harm or exclude BIPOC. We must consciously create a school culture in which staff and students of color know they are respected, valued, and supported.

On a school level, we need to examine our enrollment and hiring practices, our school policies/procedures and our employee handbook to ensure that we are not inadvertently excluding or discriminating against BIPOC.

Committing ourselves to anti-racist work means evaluating and revising our curriculum and classroom libraries so that there is equitable and appropriate representation of BIPOC. When teaching standards and curriculum, we need to understand that some resources are rooted in historically racist practices that may exclude, diminish, or misrepresent the voices and perspectives of those in disenfranchised communities. We must be sure that the resources we use are not disproportionately centered on the contributions and accomplishments of White Americans, but that students are also given opportunities to gain a more inclusive, nuanced and broad understanding of history, by learning about diverse perspectives.

Students of color in our classrooms need to see themselves reflected accurately and respectfully in the books, images, and conversations that are part of classroom life. White students also need windows into the lives of people who come from communities and cultures different from their own. In addition, it is essential that our studies do not just focus on suffering and disadvantage, but that we provide empowering examples and illuminate positive contributions of various BIPOC, so that our students can learn to celebrate the contributions of people from a wide range of diverse cultures.

Teachers and other staff should model for students how to be upstanders, rather than bystanders. Students should be given language and tools to help them know various ways they can be allies when they see an injustice occur. They should be encouraged to treat people as individuals rather than perpetuating biases or racial stereotypes.

We must avoid engaging in partisan politics or promoting particular platforms of political parties and leaders. At the same time, we do have an obligation, as educators, to help students understand that people's lives are directly impacted by political systems. Students need to understand how our nation's government is structured and the process by which laws are created, upheld and sometimes changed. Students should learn about times throughout history when the laws of this nation have promoted and ensured freedom, liberty and human rights, as well as times when laws have systematically diminished people's access to resources, opportunity, and equal treatment.

In closing, we acknowledge that to accept the challenge of this enormous work, within our small school, within our small town, is indeed quite fundamental to the change and progress that needs to occur on a more global scale. We must accept the responsibility that supporting human rights is the only thing that is right. If we cannot have these difficult conversations or address challenging issues here, then substantial progress toward uprooting racism and achieving the American ideals of liberty and justice for all will never be fully realized.

