



June 11, 2020

Dear Greater Egg Harbor Regional Families,

We have never experienced a worldwide pandemic of this proportion in our lifetime. We have, however, regularly observed and experienced racism, bigotry and hatred towards people of color.

Earlier this year, an unprecedented and deadly virus interrupted our lives. Our world, nation, state and communities united and adjusted our behaviors and beliefs in response to COVID 19. Motivated by personal fear, we made difficult changes. The threat was personal, so our reactions were swift. We acknowledged and accepted that the virus exists; it is real; it causes harm. In a similar way, we must recognize, accept and acknowledge that racism and social injustice are just as real, just as harmful, and just as deadly. As quickly as we changed our personal behaviors and routines to protect ourselves, we should change our thoughts, our philosophies, our practices, to address inequality and protect one another.

Like so many of you, I have spent these past weeks watching, reading and reflecting on the protests around the country as a result of the senseless murder of George Floyd and other black and brown men and women before him. Our Commissioner of Education Dr. Lamont Repollet highlighted that the “inequities that exist within our nation plague citizens from the time they are born and follow them as they mature in a society that all too often perceives them as being less than. These citizens are our families, friends, neighbors and most importantly, our students...All too often, we continue to function in a system that predicates and promotes inequities among our most vulnerable populations. We must defend the right to equal education for our students, all of them, regardless of race, religion, gender, sexual identity or ability. For one, that means breaking down systems that put African American students at a disadvantage.”

Our district is committed to equity and equality in our schools, both in the lessons we teach students and in our actions. We strive to reflect this respect in the way we treat one another. We engage and encourage our staff and students to have an open and honest dialogue about the issues we face in our communities and our world. We want to focus greater efforts to provide an environment of mutual respect and acknowledge our diversity as our greatest strength. We are indeed different, and that difference makes us extraordinary.

Mr. Floyd's tragic death has spurred a range of emotions in all of us. We understand how difficult and challenging talking about these issues can be, but we must participate in this conversation. Here at Greater Egg Harbor Regional, we are confronting these truths every day. We are engaging each other in meaningful, difficult conversations that we believe will help us better serve our students, parents and community. Similarly, we know our families are having these difficult discussions at home. To assist you in facilitating open and honest discussions about social injustice and racism, we offer the following resources:

**Talking About Race:**

<https://nmaahc.si.edu/learn/talking-about-race/topics/being-antiracist>

**Talking About Race:**

<https://nmaahc.si.edu/learn/talking-about-race>

**Social Awareness and How to Talk to Kids About Race and Racism – Parent Toolkit NBC News and Learn:**

<https://www.parenttoolkit.com/social-and-emotional-development/advice/social-awareness/how-to-talkto-kids-about-race-and-racism>

**Talking to Children About Racial Bias:**

<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/healthy-living/emotional-wellness/Building-Resilience/Pages/Talking-to-Children-About-Racial-Bias.aspx>

**Talking to Children After Racial Incidents:**

<https://www.gse.upenn.edu/news/talking-children-after-racial-incidents>

In recent years, we have increased our focus on disparities and inequalities that exist in our district. We have prioritized learning more about our students as individuals. We have reached into our communities for guidance. Despite all of this, we must do more. We must do better. We must continue to examine ourselves to better understand how our differences impact our relationships, trust, and most importantly, student achievement. We also acknowledge that a majority of our staff does not look like or equally represent a majority of our students. This truth has always concerned us, and though we have worked to create in-roads with universities and organizations focused on educational diversity, we can and will do more in this area.

Public education must be immersed in and intertwined with progress. We accept that responsibility and will continue to examine ourselves, demand more of ourselves, and work with our community to expand opportunities for success to our most marginalized students.

Our current efforts include:

- Curriculum revisions dedicated to inclusion with topics and resources on equity, racial and social injustices to both improve academic outcomes for students and heal educational inequities among our most vulnerable populations.
- Our district has invested in professional development training for staff that includes the following topics:
  - Implicit bias and cultural awareness for building inclusive classrooms for all students.
  - Restorative practices for eliminating racial disparities in discipline.
  - Trauma-informed practices to understand how student learning and behavior is impacted by trauma.
  - Mental Health Youth First Aid training to better assist our students who may need additional support.
  - LGBTQ training to better understand and support the unique challenges that our students and staff often encounter.
- Recruitment and hiring to bring diversity to our faculty. Our district is working in collaboration with the Urban Teacher Academy Program at Rowan University.
- Access to Technology to reduce the digital divide within our community. Greater Egg Harbor will become a 1:1 Chromebook district where each student will receive a chromebook for home and school usage beginning in September of 2020. We have a clear picture of the digital divide and we have devoted funds from the CARES Act to remedy this inequity.

These are troubled, uncertain times. The challenges facing us as educators, like those facing us as humans, are unprecedented and formidable. But now is a time for hope, unity and hard work. We want our schools to be beacons for our community. Know that we stand with you. Know that we will do this difficult work with you. Know that we stand by your side in the fight for justice, and we will do our part to look within and find change we can all feel proud of.

Sincerely,



John J. Keenan  
Superintendent of Schools

Additional resources can be found on our website:

[Talking About Racism - Curricular Resources](#)