

# **BASD superintendent Dr. Roy: “We need to educate for anti-racism”**

The Bethlehem Gadfly Education, George Floyd killing June 22, 2020

 *Latest in a series of posts on the response to the George Floyd killing* 

*from Joseph Roy, “Your View by Bethlehem school superintendent: How we will teach students to be ‘anti-racist’.” Morning Call, June 19, 2020.*

When we talk about racism, we tend to avoid actually using the word race. This is a perfect example of the advantages and power of primarily White leaders to choose the words we use. We talk about training for multicultural awareness, tolerance, diversity, equity, inclusion – but we avoid the words race and racism.

We ended this sad legacy in the Bethlehem Area School District last August, when I challenged our teachers to be “anti-racists” and not just “not racist.”

Anti-racists actively look for and work to end policies and practices that have a disparate impact on black and Latino people. “Not racist” implies a bystander approach to racism. Anti-racism requires us to do something.

BASD is involved in powerful anti-racist work in early literacy, closing racial opportunity gaps and moving black and Latino students to higher levels of reading proficiency. Early reading proficiency is highly correlated with high school and college graduation and more successful life outcomes.

When we eliminate racial differences in reading outcomes, we are acting as anti-racists. BASD’s anti-racist work also includes working with community partners to expand high-speed internet access for students in

their homes, reinstating middle school intramurals to engage students in after-school activities, revising our Gifted and Talented program policies and procedures, increasing access to dual enrollment college courses, implementing seminar courses to support black and Latino students, and expanding our community school and mental health partnerships to bring more services to students and families.

Despite this good work, recent messages from current and former BASD students made me realize our anti-racism work is missing a larger picture. These black, white and Latino students are closely watching current events, and simply asked, “Why didn’t I learn about this in school?”

Of course, our curriculum covers the Constitution, slavery, the Civil War, Jim Crow and the Civil Rights era. But we obviously fell short in educating these students on the deep-seated, wide-ranging and up-to-the-present consequences of racism.

BASD’s anti-racist work focuses primarily on supporting black and Latino students in overcoming the barriers they face as a result of racism. Like a doctor bandaging a wound, this work is important and necessary, but it is insufficient.

If we do not end the cause of the wound, we are always bandaging but never truly healing. We need to leverage education to end the cause of that wound. We need to educate for anti-racism.

Education’s most enduring contribution to ending racism must be to explicitly teach all students about the origins and continuation of racism. BASD students attend classes with a wonderful range of diverse races, cultures and languages. They are comfortable with differences between people in a way previous generations never were.

But our curriculum needs to expose our students to the history and horrors of racism. Nor have we done enough to teach the scientific, cultural and artistic contributions of black and Latino Americans.

In order to cure the disease of racism, we need all of our students to understand the impact of racism on society so they are prepared to live their lives as anti-racists. White students can be informed anti-racist allies of their Latino and black brothers and sisters.

When white Americans become anti-racists, the culture of white advantage, white supremacy and racial inequities will change.

As our country stands in yet another crossroads about racism and the role of policing in society, BASD commits to taking the following actions.

- At the start of school, we will harness our students' interest in and concerns about what they are now witnessing and teach for a deeper understanding of the historical context of present-day racism and social justice protests.
- We will reform secondary American history courses to honestly and accurately include the realities of racism, the progress we have made and the long, difficult road that lies ahead. Our literature selections will continue to expand diverse authors and cultures. In order to move our country forward, we must educate students to become truly anti-racist.
- We will undertake a review of the purpose, rationale and outcomes of our School Resource Officer program.
- We will continue our ongoing equity and diversity work through Restorative Listening Circles, Trauma Informed Schools and Restorative Practices.

A well-educated citizenry is the goal of public education and the foundation of a democratic society. It's well past time that we recognize citizens cannot be "well-educated" without learning why they must be anti-racists. Our goal is that no BASD student ever asks again, "Why wasn't I taught about this?"