



May 19, 2021

Dear Washington State Educator or Staff Member:

Recently, the nation watched as a jury convicted former Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin of three counts of murder and manslaughter in the May 2020 death of George Floyd.

As organizations, we are united in our commitment to making schools a safe place for **all** our students, staff, and families. We know many of you are responding to questions from your students about the trial, the verdict, race, and racism, and we encourage you to continue organizing structured time for students to reflect and process together.

Resources are available to assist you in structuring the time and facilitating these discussions, and it's important to remember that the top priority during tough conversations is safety. As trained and experienced professionals, you already know how to create a safe environment where each student feels valued, heard, and seen. You know that listening with empathy, providing students with direct support, and engaging with students authentically all help to create a safe environment for open discussion.

In the Association of Washington Student Leaders' [Opportunity, Equity, and Access Guidebook](#), the students provided sample engagement phrases and open-ended questions adults can utilize with students around these topics (page 4).

Some of these questions include:

- “What do you think about ___?”
- “If you are comfortable, I would love to hear what you have to say around the topics of equity, and let’s engage in a meaningful, productive conversation surrounding equity.”
- “Speak what is on your mind. It is okay if you do not have the right words or phrasing. We can grow and learn together.”
- “How can we make this (school, classroom, club, etc.) a safe space for you? What does safe look like, sound like, and feel like to you?”

It’s important to remember that schools aren’t islands. When students enter our schools and classrooms, the outside world doesn’t shut off. Our students are learning about algebra and reading at the same time they are navigating complex issues in their communities and personal lives. Our job isn’t just to prepare our students academically – it’s our job to teach our students how to be critical thinkers, how to express their emotions and feelings in a healthy way, and how to play an active and effective role in their community.

We encourage you to facilitate and create space for discussions with your students about race, racism, racial injustice, and equity regularly; inviting students to share their lived experiences and the experiences of their communities, which will help build trust and safety in your school spaces over time.

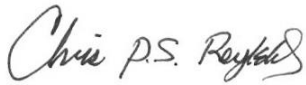
Following are resources and tools that are designed to help you create safe and supportive spaces for your students to participate in civil engagement and discourse about race and racism:

- [Opportunity, Equity, and Access Guidebook](#), by the Association of Washington Student Leaders
- [Creating the Space to Talk About Race in Your School](#), by the National Education Association
- [Talking About Race](#), by the National Museum of African American History and Culture
- [15 Classroom Resources for Discussing Racism, Policing, and Protest](#), by Education Week
- [Equity and Racial Justice Resources List](#), compiled by the Washington Association of School Administrators

Each of us plays a role in fostering school and workplace environments where every student, staff, family, and community member feels valued, respected, and seen. These kinds of environments aren’t created in a day. They are built and sustained over time through compassion, honesty, listening with empathy, and ongoing opportunities for dialogue and reflection.

As always, thank you for your unwavering commitment to creating compassionate, respectful, and safe learning environments that support our students, educators, families, and communities.

Sincerely,



Chris Reykdal
Superintendent of
Public Instruction



Scott Seaman
Executive Director,
Association of Washington
School Principals



Joel Aune
Executive Director,
Washington Association of
School Administrators



Tim Garchow
Executive Director,
Washington State
School Directors' Association



Larry Delaney
President, Washington
Education Association



Kim Holland
Executive Director,
Washington School
Personnel Association



Charlotte Schindler,
President, Public
School Employees



Karen Hart
President, SEIU 925



James Layman
Director of Student
Programs, Association of
Washington Student Leaders