



Racial Justice in Education

DISCUSSION GUIDE

Why we must act

To realize our mission and vision to achieve racial justice for all students, NEA will advance an anti-racist education position and agenda. We must change the institutions that are driving inequity and unfair treatment in public schools through awareness, education, and activism. This will include difficult and honest conversations that will inspire and facilitate action at all levels of the organization. In addition, we will engage internal and external actions that support and empower educators to challenge institutional racism in our classrooms and schools. We must also confront and challenge individuals and organizations that promote patterns of inequity and stand as barriers to racial justice for all students.

Guidance for having Authentic Conversations about Race*

Conversations about race, racial justice, and institutional racism are difficult. Typically we can find ourselves attempting to navigate a waterfall of emotions including anger, fear, grief, frustration and confusion. We can also find ourselves grappling with feeling misunderstood or judged.

Achieving the goal of race equity, of truly removing the fortified racial barriers our society has built over time, requires dedicated people using effective tools at every stage of their work for social change. Advancing race equity is critical to achieving our organization's overall mission and is everyone's responsibility.

Candid conversations about race are not easy. But authentic conversations about race are crucial. They allow perspectives to be exchanged, insights to be shared and beliefs and assumptions to be addressed in positive ways. Authentic conversations create understanding, growth and empathy. Most important, they are the first step in generating ideas and solutions for ending the unfairness that is denying opportunities to the children, families and communities at the heart of our work.

Authentic conversations require the following agreed upon "Community Norms":

Awareness and Self-Knowledge

This requires self-knowledge and self-awareness. Self-knowledge allows you to see what causes you pain and conflict and enables you to embrace your contradictions and inconsistencies. It allows the space to work on things about yourself that you are not happy with. In turn, self-knowledge helps to prevent you from projecting your negative aspects onto other people. Bringing your best self also requires that you have a positive attitude, are willing to deeply explore your perspectives and remain open to the perspectives and experiences of others.

Listening for Understanding

Be an active listener. Active listening involves paying full and careful attention to the other person, looking him or her in the eye, avoiding interruptions, reflecting your understanding, clarifying information, summarizing the other person's perspectives and sharing your own. Remember that most people need time to open up and might not be willing to immediately share their personal stories, hopes, fears and/or concerns.

Being Gracious

Being kind is a vital way of bringing meaning to our own lives, as well as the lives of others. Kindness is about caring genuinely for others around you, wanting the best for them and recognizing in them the same wants,

needs, aspirations and even fears that you may have. Being kind and generous allows us to communicate better with others, to be more self-compassionate and to be a positive force in other people's lives.

Stay Engaged

Staying engaged requires you to be morally, emotionally, intellectually and socially involved in the conversation. Staying engaged means that you are listening with curiosity and willing to deepen your understanding. Staying engaged might also require you to sustain the conversation even when it gets uncomfortable or diverted.

Be Open and Suspend Judgment

Listening with an open mind includes being receptive to the influence of others. You can suspend judgment by becoming aware of preconceived notions and listening to everything someone has to say before jumping to conclusions. Most importantly, suspending judgment also means listening to what the speaker has to say for understanding, not just to determine whether the speaker is right or wrong.

Say "I"- tell your truth

Speaking your truth in authentic and courageous conversations about race requires a willingness to take risks. It means that you will be absolutely honest and candid about your own thoughts, feelings, experiences and opinions and not just saying what you perceive others want to hear. Speaking your truth will require you to speak from the "first person" and use "I" statements.

Seek Discomfort

Leaning in to discomfort will require you to let go of racial understandings and stereotypes that you may be holding onto in order to move forward. Leaning in means that you will avoid judgment, assume positive intent and be open to the kernel of wisdom in each individual's experiences. Leaning in to discomfort will require you to sit through moments of embarrassment, confusion, anxiety and/or fear.

Reaching Empathy

Empathy and compassion allow you to understand the other person's point of view. When you are empathetic, you are more understanding, patient and kind. Expanding your capacity to feel empathy will also allow others to enter your circle of human concern.

Resolution and Closure

Expect and accept that there may not be closure. It is not likely that you will resolve your personal understanding about race or another person's racial experience in a single conversation. The more you talk about race with another person, the more you learn and the more they will learn. Authentic and productive conversations about race are continuous and always evolving.

**Adapted from "Embracing equity and inclusion", Annie E. Casey Foundation*

Questions you can ask to facilitate a deeper dialogue:

Foundational

- Why do you believe NEA is engaging in Racial Justice in Education work?
- What hopes and fears do you have as a result of NEA's position to engage in this work?
- How do you see this work impacting public education and our students?

Understanding & Awareness

- What is Institutional racism? What does it mean to you?
- What does racial justice in education look like to you?
- What is white supremacy?
- What role does white supremacy play in institutional racism?
- What is white privilege?
- What role does white privilege play in institutional racism?
- How does racism manifest itself in non-visible societal structures and functions?
- How have you observed institutional racism in schools?
- In what ways do we have an ethical and professional responsibility to approach our work with the goal of diminishing institutional racism?
- What structures/policies/practices in our districts perpetuate inequality?
- What would happen if we didn't do anything about institutional racism?
- What will we do about institutional racism?
- How has institutional racism affected our society?

Individual

- What role have you played in addressing institutional racism?
- What biases do you hold and how do those biases impact you in your role(s)?
- How has institutional racism affected you as an individual?
- What does the perpetuation of the effects of institutional racism do to you as a moral person?
- How can an individual make a difference?
- How can you find your own voice to talk about these issues?
- How will you respond when you observe racism in action?
- What role can you play in ending institutional racism and advancing racial justice in education?

Students

- What does institutional racism do to you in your role as an educator and/or leader?
- How does institutional racism affect our schools and students?
- How do biases impact young people in our schools?
- How have you practiced biases in our schools?
- How do your biases affect students' ability to achieve their dreams?
- What are you doing to meet the needs of children of color?
- In what ways are you dealing with issues of racism in your schools? Communities? Networks?
- Why do we believe all students can learn/excel?
- What does it say about us, our educational system allowing some groups of students to regularly fail?
 - Who have we lost? Why did that happen? What are we going to do about it?
- If your child's neighborhood or assigned school was identified as "high needs", would you seek alternatives? If so, why? What would need to change for the school to be acceptable for your child?

Future Systems Thinking

- In what way are you introducing a new world to the next generation of society? (Changing the system)
- What might you do to change the system for the next generation?
- What can you do to prevent our differences in privilege from becoming barriers to opportunity?
- What kind of education system are you passing on?
- How do we create systems free of bias that support students?