



Office of the Board of Education

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Hello YCS Community,

By now, we have all heard that the stay-at-home order announced on March 23, 2020 by Governor Whitmer was largely rescinded on June 1, however the State of Emergency was extended until July 16th. As we are safely and cautiously returning to our new way of life during this uncertain time, we know that with the nice weather it is easy to slip into a business as usual habit. We must be vigilant because we know this pandemic is very much still with us, as evidenced by the spike in cases we see in other states. We hope everyone will all continue to follow the important health and safety guidelines issued by the county, state and public health professionals. In the [new executive order](#), Governor Whitmer stated: "While Michiganders are no longer required to stay home, we must all continue to be smart and practice safe social distancing." This new order further states: "Any work that is capable of being performed remotely (i.e., without the worker leaving his or her home or place of residence) must be performed remotely." While we can begin returning to some semblance of normalcy, according to this new executive order, we should all practice safe social distancing and continue working remotely when possible. The Board of Education will likely continue conducting virtual board meetings through the summer unless we can gather in person while honoring strict health and safety protocols.

Over the past few weeks, most of us have watched in disbelief, outrage, and anger, a series of racial incidents, including the most recent brutal murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis at the hands of police officers. Incidents like these even in our own community, provide moments to act, stand firm, and speak loudly and clearly -- that hate, discrimination, and racism in any form are not acceptable and will not be tolerated. We join with others in condemning the individuals and actions that caused George Floyd's death and commit to an unwavering denunciation of hate, racism, violence, and police brutality that continues to permeate our communities. Unfortunately, we are witnessing how racial violence, racial microaggressions, discrimination, harassment, and willful disregard for humanity has plagued our country for generations and continues to go largely unchecked.

Like all of you, we've witnessed citizens around the world protest racial violence and discrimination and we are inspired to see individuals and communities come together through words and action to stand against our nation's systemic and institutionalized structures of racism that are deeply entrenched in our nation. We are also heart-broken that in the midst of the protests and civil unrest, yet another black life was needlessly taken when Rayshard Brooks was killed by the police in Atlanta. And, while not deadly, the actions of a white San Francisco skincare CEO and her husband captured in a now viral video confronting a man writing Black Lives Matter on his own property, point to the racism prevalent in our society and the common microaggressions experienced by people of color daily. These incidents individually and collectively must be called out as we demand change and justice.

It is our obligation to be part of the solution, engage in anti-racist actions and not further inequities, injustices, and racism. It is emotionally exhausting and hard to breathe and exist in a world where we are living through a pandemic and protests simultaneously that largely impact black and brown communities. The sentiments expressed by Dr. Toni Pressely-Sanon at Eastern Michigan University [here](#) and Dr. Robert Sellers at the University of Michigan [here](#) encapsulates how difficult this existence can be. Black people are constantly under surveillance, suspicion, questioned, doubted, minimized, overlooked, profiled, and killed. The daily microaggressions minoritized people experience is absolutely exhausting and **there is no part of YCS, the School Board, and the Ypsilanti community that is exempt from these experiences.** During this time, we urge folks to not place the burden on black and brown communities to figure this out. If you identify as white, please do not ask what can be done, but instead enter into that conversation as a white person sharing what you are willing to do. We want white people to educate themselves, talk to their white friends, and listen to what people of color have literally been screaming about for years.

As we grapple with the myriad of issues facing our country, we must continue to demonstrate leadership, compassion, and advocacy to call attention to the most pressing issues facing America today -- concerns that have often been met with resistance and have afflicted this nation for far too long -- dating back to 1619, as August 20, 2019 marked the 400th anniversary of slavery in this country. On this dark day in 1619, Africans were forcibly brought to Jamestown, Virginia -- marking the beginning of two and a half centuries of slavery in North America. Today we bear witness to the legacy of slavery through mass incarceration, white supremacy, police brutality, racial violence, and profound inequities that permeate our society. The New York Times created the powerful 1619 project and if you haven't already, we hope that you will take the time to read the piece that is attached to this email. 10 days ago we also recognized an important date in our history, Juneteenth. June 19th commemorates the end of slavery and provides us with yet another opportunity to reflect on our past.

It is important to acknowledge that we need to move beyond just emphasizing how this history and recent events make us feel and be compelled to do something different. We serve a district of students who are predominately from minoritized communities. Our board of education and staff are majority white -- this is our reality in YCS. It is up to us to examine if our actions, policies, and practices reflect the values we espouse and hold each other accountable. It is time for us to get honest about white privilege, white supremacy, and what we can do together to dismantle structures which maintain and perpetuate the status quo in our systems. As shared in a recent article, if we want to show that black lives matter, we should start with making sure education matters for all students, no matter what their zip code is. Superintendent Zachery-Ross shared the important article titled, *If black lives really matter, let's prove it by fixing our schools*, which can be found [here](#). The article highlights the importance of action and if we believe education is the great equalizer, then we owe our students every chance, opportunity, and resource available to move towards a more just world. This moment and movement charges us all with a responsibility to act. We can begin by asking if the way we view ourselves is reflected in how we engage with others, our policies and practices, and the ways we advocate for change. A compelling and powerful question for us all to ponder is: **How have I managed to be a full functioning professional adult and not know what to do about racism?**

As a school system, we can often be viewed by our community as anchors during times of crisis. As an institution of learning we must commit to more listening, learning, and the promotion of greater awareness and understanding surrounding racism and demands for accountability, change, activism, and social justice. We hope this continues to be a major focus of our work and commend all of you for your engagement and actions as we prepare for the months ahead.

The mission and values of Ypsilanti Community Schools includes, but is not limited to respect for all individuals, inclusiveness, responsibility, accountability, and equity. The school board and administrative team are charged with meeting and monitoring the educational, social, and emotional needs of students, authentically engaging families, supporting our teachers and staff, setting and adopting policy, being good stewards of the district's resources, and serving our community. Individually and collectively, we have much work to do, and admittedly there are times when we fall short in aligning our values with our actions, but it is imperative to recommit to this important work if we want better outcomes.

The commitments we make to be anti-racist will show up in our work and service every day, no matter what our roles are.

As schools across the country prepare for a new academic year in the Fall, we know that many of our students will return to school with increased social,

emotional, and educational needs. Although we will not be able to fully anticipate the level of impact and trauma on our youth and families, we must be prepared. This is a time for us to reflect, look internally, and work collectively to root out and dismantle the inequities and injustices that threaten our livelihoods. It will be difficult and we will experience setbacks, but if we continue to remain steadfast, dedicated, and unwavering in always doing what is right, our society and importantly our children, will be the beneficiaries of leading and inheriting a world where everyone matters. So in closing, we want to offer, in the spirit of the reggae prophet Bob Marley, who said, "he who feels it knows it," and prolific poet and author Maya Angelou, who said, "people will forget what you said, but people will never forget how you made them feel." The words of people of color who know and feel what it means to suffer through too often die from the disease of white supremacy and racism. Together, if we speak with one voice, we can stand unified against hate, racism, and the police brutality that targets our black and brown communities. We were given two ears and one mouth for a reason. If we want to be a true ally, we must remember to say more than just "I support you" and "this is awful." We must stand in solidarity through our words and action and recognize that caring deeply is simply not enough.

It is our hope that all of you will take a stance of solidarity against injustice, racism, and join us in this call to action because Black Lives Matter everyday!

As we move forward, our actions will be crucial. Please review Superintendent Zachery-Ross' statement of action and next steps for YCS, which can be found [here](#)

In solidarity,
YCS Board of Education and Superintendent Zachery-Ross