



JUNE 11, 2020

WEBINAR 8 SUMMARY: REDUCING THE EFFECTS OF RACISM

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Discovery Education *Equity Talks* is a live webinar series featuring our nation's top educational leaders with a focus on cultivating equity and excellence. Moderated by Dr. Luvelle Brown – superintendent of Ithaca City School District – these 45-minute segments are designed to provide guidance and support to educators across the country and internationally who are struggling with issues of equity that, while always a topic of concern, have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, nationwide civil unrest, and the need to rely on remote and hybrid learning.

Summary

This webinar began with consideration of the ongoing protests sparked by George Floyd's death. Panelists were asked to reflect on how the protests connect to school inequalities. One panelist observed that inequalities are more visible now than ever before, making it more difficult to deny that they exist. Another panelist shared that the communities that are overpoliced are often the same ones that are underserved in terms of schooling and community resources. Further, a different panelist added that when people do not feel connection or value, unrest occurs in schools and in communities, adding, "The child not embraced by its village will burn it down to feel its warmth." Change must occur

to remove the inequalities; we must listen and act accordingly.

Panelists were asked to share how Student Resource Officers (SROs) might avoid criminalizing black and brown students. They shared that SROs must build and maintain genuine relationships with all students, eat with them in the cafeteria, read books, and interact with the community. A panelist described the importance of all staff focusing on inequalities in race, examining their own personal perspectives and how racial inequalities have affected school systems. All staff can help lead each other– show up for all students in spite of what is happening. In addition, their leadership provides resources, including those for SROs. They engage in a holistic process:

They focus on research-based practices, they foster constructive conversation about school equity, they provide behavioral and social-emotional curricula and learning support, and they engage in regular strategic planning. Panelists noted that SROs must be provided with training and supports that come from the education system, local community, and the state so that they foster positive relationships with students. SROs must lead based on student investments rather than punishment.

Two of the panelists who were white leaders were asked what other white leaders should be doing in their schools. They reflected on using their own privilege, their own voice, to speak up, to challenge norms, and to ensure that other perspectives are acknowledged. One panelist shared their fear of causing more harm in the community than good, but was fueled by the support of colleagues and community members of color. The other panelist shared the importance of listening, being mindful of daily interactions with students, and acknowledging how leaders carry themselves and the words they use. They shared how white leaders must take and apply critical feedback and advice from those people of color to make change.

One panelist who was African American was asked to reflect on what needs to change so that people of color can be part of antiracist behaviors and actions. This panelist said, "No one is off the hook." The panelists shared how they learned about racism through a white supremacy framework in America. They noted that many people who learned about it in the same way do not notice the need for change in policies and practices. They discussed barriers that keep some students from reaching their potential, including Advanced Placement courses and the school building's behavioral practices. One way they have worked to help reduce racist behaviors and actions in their leadership is by having staff directly review data and trends, identifying work that needs to be done and holding themselves accountable for that work. In addition, they work with organizations that can bring awareness of racial equity to schools (e.g., The Racial Equity Institute) and provide regular

workshops and trainings for vulnerable groups including English language learners. The panelists shared that everyone must be proactive; otherwise, we all end up paying for it on the back end.

Near closing, the panelists were engaged in "lightning questions." When asked for one thing people can do tomorrow to transform education, panelists said:

- 1) Be aware of what's going on and do something about it.
- 2) Treat others the way you want to be treated.
- 3) Ask questions of people to whom you have not historically listened, then listen.

The second question asked panelists what they think school will look like when it reopens. They responded:

- 1) It will look different, a different normal with the opportunity to be a better design for all students
- 2) It should look more learner-centered.
- 3) It should focus on relationship building before academics.

Finally, panelists were asked to share what they would say to inspire people to reduce inequalities. They reported:

- 1) Respect one another, even if you do not agree, and have empathy to grow.
- 2) Make creative change and use collective wisdom to build something better
- 3) Have courage – have conversations, be mindful, and be champions for students.

Pertinent Quotes

- "Our normal wasn't working for all of our children. We have an opportunity to design a better normal for all children that creates a sense of belonging for all children."
- "Racial unrest has made people uncomfortable, regardless of the race. It might have taken this to inspire the conversations we are having. There is

probably a true silver lining from this. It has brought light to our communities.”

- “The imbalance of power is reflected in the schools. And the communities that are overpoliced are often the same ones that are underserved in terms of schools and what they need, like fresh produce or access to healthcare in their community. Those children will come to our schools without some of the things they need to be successful, and when they encounter our school system, we are often not prepared to address their needs.”
- “The child not embraced in its village will burn it down to feel its warmth.”
- “In terms of policing, the only way school resource officers can continue a positive relationship with your schools is through training and support.”
- “Listen and do. We have to keep checking out white privilege. It’s our day-to-day interactions, our interactions with kids, the way we carry ourselves, and the words we use.”
- “Our collective wisdom will allow us to build something better and stronger.”

Additional Questions/Commentary

- We do need more Black and Brown educators, so how do we recruit them?
- How do you train teachers to implement proper SEL practices in the classroom?
- What advice does the panelist have for educators who are not interested in becoming discomfoted to make the changes needed?
- “It is refreshing to hear a panel discussion on systemic racism 1) where there are white folk on the panel, 2) that initiates a courageous discussion about White privilege, 3) which is honest about the discomfort of dealing with issues of race, and 4) which affirms we need to take action.”

Resources for Consideration

- REI racialequityinstitute, llc. (n.d.). The racial equity institute. REI racialequityinstitute, llc. <https://www.racialequityinstitute.com/>
- Metz, J. (2019). *Dying of whiteness: How the politics of racial resentment is killing America’s heartland* (First ed.). Basic Books.
- Robinson, J. (2017, September 14-15). *History of race in America* [Paper presentation]. National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers First Annual Presidential Summit and Seminar Race matters: The impact on criminal justice, Detroit, MI. <https://www.nacdl.org/getattachment/78a08d12-37a0-4160-9c2b-3468bdf26c29/history-of-race-jeffery-robinson-race-matters-i.pdf>
- Kendi, I. X. (2016). *Stamped from the beginning: The definitive history of racist ideas in America*. Nation Books.
- Rothstein, R. (2017). *The color of law: A forgotten history of how our government segregated America* (1st ed.). Liveright Publishing Corporation, a division of W.W. Norton & Company.
- Woodson, C. G., & 3M Company. (2013). *The mis-education of the negro*. Start Publishing LLC.
- Shedd, C. (2015). *Unequal city: Race, schools, and perceptions of injustice*. Russell Sage Foundation.
- DiAngelo, R. J. (2018). *White fragility: Why it’s so hard for white people to talk about racism*. Beacon Press.
- Wise, T. J. (2011). *White like me: Reflections on race from a privileged son: The remix* (Rev. and updated.). Soft Skull Press.