



FOREST HILLS PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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Daniel S. Behm, Superintendent

June 3, 2020

Dear Forest Hills Families,

I write to you today as our nation faces two pandemics: the coronavirus and systemic racism. The first pandemic is new and its effects have been felt by everyone in recent weeks. The pandemic of racism is centuries old and its effects are uneven with people of color suffering from oppression for generations while too often white people remain silent on the sidelines. We must work hard to bring both of these pandemics to an end. In order for our efforts to bear fruit, we must all do our part. We can easily see this with our communal sacrifices to bring the coronavirus pandemic to an end. Likewise, with the pandemic of racism, every single one of us must do our part.

As a dad working with my wife to help our children at home each day, I sometimes am at a loss helping my children process systemic racism, violence, and hate. But I know the fight against racism begins at home – affirming to our children that every person on the planet is a precious gift and filled with incalculable potential; that everyone is deserving of kindness, care, mutual respect, and liberty; and that peace drives out violence and love drives out hate. Additionally, and with a heavy heart, I explain to my children that racism is an evil system built upon a false belief that white people are supreme to people of color. I further explain that this system is old and yet still thrives in our world today. The system is more hidden and complex today than it was 150 years ago, but its effects are devastating and deadly. This system thrives when we are silent, afraid, indifferent, and fail to listen to the people who experience its effects day after day. We combat racism by shining a light on it, speaking out against it, and working collaboratively to root it out of every system and institution.

As we desperately search for a vaccine for the coronavirus pandemic, we do have a vaccine to fight against racism—it's education. Learning about the painful history of racism, its generational impacts on economic, social, and political systems, and the real-life impacts on people of color are powerful starting points. But we must open these systems to critical examinations to uncover the ways in which racism becomes institutionalized and unseen to those unaffected by it. We must work together to create conditions in our schools where we can build trust and space for authentic dialogue. It is in these spaces where we learn that unintentional acts hurt the same as intentional acts. We learn how some of our practices actually serve to exclude others rather than include all. We learn that empathetic listening yields deeper understanding, healing, and restoration of true community. We learn how to become anti-racists committed to taking bold action to eradicate this pandemic.

I am grateful to the staff members, parents, students, and community members who are committed to ensuring that our schools are places where everyone is welcome, included, seen, valued, and cared for. I am grateful for the efforts of many in FHPS to build [Global Champions](#), facilitate [Institutes for Healing Racism](#), implement [Restorative Practices](#), and create student leaders and Global Scholars who are warriors against racism and for inclusion, equity, and belonging. We have done important and hard work over many years, but we have much more work to do and each day we delay the pandemic has the potential to grow.

"All learners achieving individual potential"

Here are a few practical resources you may choose to help process these important, traumatic, and tough issues with your own children. Please feel free to reach out to your child's teacher, counselor, or principal and we can connect you with even more resources and personal assistance.

- [Something Happened in Our Town](#)
- [Teaching Tolerance](#)
- [Addressing Racism with Younger Children - Lovevery](#)
- [National Association of School Psychologists](#)

Our schools can be places of hope, strength, knowledge, restoration, and positive action in our fight to eradicate the pandemic of racism. Our community has boundless potential for sacrificial love and building a better world. Thank you for taking a stand, for supporting one another, and for the continued work it will take to win this fight.

With deep respect and appreciation,

Dan Behm
Superintendent