

## **Tips and Talking Points for Responding to Matters of Race & Equity:**

We are all under tremendous pressure right now to be eloquent, emotionally mature leaders at the same time that we've been stretched thin for months of high stakes, high stress pandemic response. Here are a few tips and talking points for leaders responding to community concerns about matters of race, equity, and current events:

- Remember that we are all under incredible stress and emotions are much closer to the surface than usual. This leads people to react more strongly than they otherwise might. **Give as much grace as you can** to everyone right now.
- All of us in positions of leadership and influence can be most helpful by **listening deeply** (even - perhaps especially - when what the other person is saying is uncomfortable), and holding ourselves to the highest standards of respect and kindness at all times, regardless of anyone else's words or behavior.
- We can **acknowledge the validity of others' feelings** even when we don't personally share those feelings, and this is an important skill to practice right now. It is okay to let others feel differently than we do, and we don't have to resolve that difference in order to express support for the other person. When that is the case, we can say things like: "I see how strongly you feel about this and I respect your experiences and feelings." That doesn't mean that you feel the same or that you agree that they are "right;" it is a simple act of person-to-person acknowledgement.
- **Don't feel like you need to have all the answers.** In fact, this is a great time to admit that you don't. Express your confidence in the wisdom and ability of your community to come together and work through these big issues.
- **Keep your focus clearly on the district's mission** of providing an excellent, equitable education to \*all\* students. Reference your committee's existing equity work and the district's public statement if you've made one. Reiterate our commitments to anti-racist work as public educators.
- If the conversation gets mired in generalities or starts to feel unproductive, you can respectfully **bring your focus back to concrete, local issues**. Ask the other person, "what can we do differently here in our community / our schools to become better about (whatever they are expressing concern or complaints about)?" Or ask, "How can we be good partners with your community right now?"

- Remember each person's humanity and worth. When interactions get heated, it can be very powerful to **re-personalize the conversation**. Ask the person you are communicating with what is important to them? How are these issues affecting their families?
- **Close with respect and gratitude**. Keep the door open for future dialogue. For example, you could say something like: "Please let me know if other thoughts come up later. I'm still learning, our district is still learning. We need your voice and perspective. Thank you for taking the time to talk with me today."