

## **BLACK LIVES MATTER**

### ***A Statement from the NYSRSAS Executive Board***

*A wide ranging discussion at the June Executive Board meeting resulted in a consensus that our organization should publish a statement expressing our thoughts on this topic. With post-meeting input from many Board members, we arrived at the document we present here.*

The violent deaths of unarmed people of color – from Trayvon Martin and Michael Brown, whose deaths spawned the Black Lives Matter movement, through Eric Garner in New York to the recent horrors of the killing of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Armed Arbury, and Rayshard Brooks – have underscored the urgency for all of us to confront the need for change in our society. Much of this will focus on government in terms of legislation, police policies and judicial processes. However, **as an association of retired school administrators and supervisors we are deeply concerned with our educational systems and their role in fostering inter-racial understanding, mutual acceptance and appreciation and, most importantly, educational equity.**

Reaction to these cases of police brutality has grown to include all Americans. **We believe that Black Lives Matter and we, as an association of retired school administrators and supervisors, support opening channels of reform which reinforce fair treatment and respect for all. We pledge to engage in conversations about racism on many levels** – at our NYSRSAS Executive Board meetings, at social gatherings with our friends and relatives, and at religious, political and service organizations to which we belong. We also recognize that, just as children learn to read and write in school, there is a critical need for schools to actively and purposefully foster understanding and teach tolerance and acceptance. Existing literature, history, music and visual arts curricula do not adequately teach the full scope of our diverse, multi-cultural, and multi-gender heritage. While there have been educators along the way who have made sincere and strong efforts to combat racism in their schools and classrooms, we need to go further. **There is too much “lip service” given to platitudes about getting along, about equality, about diversity – it’s time for schools and community institutions to “step up.”**

A part of this will involve deep reflection upon educators’ roles in fostering opportunity for students. Many black writers have spoken about how some teachers have assumed lower intelligence and/or motivation among their students of color and have, therefore, challenged them less and expected lower performance from them, thus contributing to a self-fulfilling prophecy. We must confront the fact that white educators, even the most well-meaning, need to address the fact that simply by virtue of being white they benefited from a privileged status even if they were not from wealthy families. Similarly, as educators we all need to consider the possibility that our backgrounds and the socialization they have imparted may make it difficult for us to appreciate the particular burdens that our students of color (and their families) confront – factors which may influence school behavior and academic performance.

**Racism is a sickness** that is deeply ingrained in western society. Systemic racism permeates every level of American society from economic opportunity to health care. **We need to recognize existing beliefs, address our biases and be willing to initiate change.** It is common knowledge that unequal school funding formulas result in communities with the most pronounced educational and social needs receiving the poorest funding. The Black Lives Matter movement challenges us to revisit and rethink school (cont’d on page 3) integration. **This is crucial on Long Island where there are underachieving school districts that are, in every practical sense, segregated racially and socioeconomically.** This has to change. There is an economic and educational argument to be made for taking action to continue efforts to build racially and socioeconomically integrated schools and districts, rather than focusing exclusively on improving the effectiveness of high poverty, high minority schools. In this respect, increasing funding will remain important, and establishing partnerships with teacher training institutions as well as with wealthier districts would be good starts. Disparity in the quality of education disproportionately bars access to higher education, and the economic and health benefits it provides. Teacher hiring and retention practices fail to adequately represent America’s diversity and provide role models in the classroom. Districts with predominantly white student populations need to recruit minority teachers and support personnel, so children would know and experience not only what diversity looks like, but also benefit from interactions with people who look different from them.

We could discuss other areas that discriminate against African Americans (for example, the disproportionate number of African Americans who make up our prison population). However, we choose to concentrate on equalizing the playing field by focusing on education and the role schools play.

**Finally, we will back our commitment to these principles by supporting candidates for all offices – school board, town council, state assembly and senate, congress and president– who embody these beliefs and have an active record promoting them.**

*July 2020*