



Ellensburg School District #401

1300 East Third Avenue Ellensburg, WA 98926, www.esd401.org, Phone: 509-925-8000, Fax: 509-925-802

June 8, 2020

Good morning ESD Staff and Parents,

In the wake of the tragic death of George Floyd and the recent outcry from our country for social justice, it is a good time for us to reflect on our own values related to what matters most in life. In the words of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in his *Letter from a Birmingham Jail*, "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly."

Clearly, we are struggling as a nation with destructive realities like systemic racism that provide privilege for some and take away general welfare for others. Race is defined by authors Singleton and Linton in their book *Courageous Conversations about Race* as a "socially constructed meaning attached to a variety of physical attributes" and racism as "beliefs and enactment of beliefs that one set of characteristics is superior to another set...a racist would be any person who subscribes to these beliefs and perpetuates them intentionally or unconsciously." (Singleton & Linton, 2006, p.39). The positive part of this definition is that if race and racism are socially created, it would stand to reason that it could also be socially deconstructed.

The death of George Floyd was heart-breaking and tragic. We encourage you to view this Ted Talk by Verna Myers titled: [How to overcome our biases? Walk boldly toward them](#). In this Ted Talk, Verna urges us to 1. Get out of denial concerning the presence of racism 2. Move towards our discomfort and 3. Take action when needed. This approach was demonstrated by the peace march that was led by two students in Ellensburg last week.

Tosha Woods, ESD Board President, and I recently discussed Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s *Letter from a Birmingham Jail* and agreed that while we have made some progress towards increasing equitable practices in ESD, we look forward to supporting our district in deepening and expanding our equity efforts. In my March Superintendent's Update <https://www.smores.com/djbz9>, I outlined the many steps we have taken this year to close opportunity gaps that exist for our subgroups of students who are not achieving at the same level as the general population. Next year, we are excited to begin a systemic approach to learning about equity using resources like Gary Howard's *We Can't Lead Where We Won't Go*. As we learn together, we will be able to better identify where inequities and systemic racism may be present and collaboratively engage in the continuous improvement cycle so that all students thrive.



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As far as next year is concerned, we are still waiting to receive the official recommendations from the Office of the Superintendent for Public Instruction (OSPI). There are many factors district-wide to consider when picking the right model for ESD for next year, such as how to maintain proper social distancing during lunches and transportation of students across all locations. The entire process of choosing the right instructional model for next year was described in my ESD Update last week and May Superintendent's Update <https://www.smores.com/6kbp3>.

Principals have spent time talking with their staff to hear their input on what is important for their faculty concerning next year. Building administrators will take this input with them as we look at the OSPI models together on June 10th and consider logistics, instructional and other factors to make recommendations that will go to the focus groups. Hearing the voices of all stakeholders will be important to best serve the needs of students, support our parents and empower our staff. We currently have approximately 200 stakeholders who have signed up to be in one of our focus groups. We have student focus groups this week and parent and staff focus groups scheduled for next week. We are confident that the process that we are using will result in identifying the very best fit for ESD for the 2020-2021 school year.

As I look towards our future, although there are many challenges ahead, I am confident in our ability to problem solve together and create a bright future for our students. Finally, I am inspired by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. when he urged us to "hope that the dark clouds of racial prejudice will soon pass away and the deep fog of misunderstanding will be lifted from our fear drenched communities, and in some not too distant tomorrow the radiant stars of love and brotherhood will shine over our great nation with all their scintillating beauty." (*Letter from a Birmingham Jail*)

Sincerely,

Jinger Haberer, Ellensburg School District Superintendent

Linton, C. & Singleton, G. (2006). *Courageous Conversations About Race*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.