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On behalf of the South Orange & Maplewood School District Board of Education, Superintendent Taylor, and Administration, the following message is a reflection on the social justice crisis sweeping across our country.

“In this country, American means white. Everybody else has to hyphenate.”
— **Toni Morrison**

We as community educational leaders are compelled to reiterate our commitment to *Equity*. However, we must first acknowledge the **pain, anger** and **angst** that so many in our district, community and society are currently experiencing. We must not be fearful to make space in our conversations around the genesis of the conflict and uprisings that we are experiencing. We must be intentional. We cannot turn a blind eye to the scourge of racism and bigotry in our country and how its legacy is compounding. Exponentially compounding, not just singular atrocities that reduce people of color to *hashtags*, but the hard to describe micro-aggressions, privilege, embedded prejudice and intolerance that is a part of our daily lives.

Now is the time to have conversations with our children and communities. We must discuss not only the images we see on our televisions and social media but more importantly, the complex truth behind the outrage and how it is connected to all of us. Below are some resources to help in your discussions with your children and/or community.

- **How to Talk to Kids about Race and Racism** - <https://www.parenttoolkit.com/social-and-emotional-development/advice/social-awareness/how-to-talk-to-kids-about-race-and-racism>
- **National Museum of African American History and Culture Releases “Talking About Race”** - <https://nmaahc.si.edu/about/news/national-museum-african-american-history-and-culture-releases-talking-about-race-web>
- **Teaching Tolerance: Beyond the Golden Rule** - <https://www.tolerance.org/magazine/publications/beyond-the-golden-rule>

Also, we are very proud of our commitment to anti-bias, anti-racist, and culturally inclusive education to all we serve. The district has demonstrated this commitment most recently through our:

- Deliberate thoughtful progress with regards to our Intentional Integration Initiative (III);
- Partnership with Hetrick-Martin Institute (HMI), for both educator professional development and student counseling in support of equity for our LGBTQ+ community;
- Restorative Practices & Equity centered job-embedded professional development for our educators, in partnership with renown scholarly experts on this topic; and,
- Recently approved curriculum revisions to 39 (and counting) curriculum guides, that include connections to the New Jersey Amistad Commission and the New Jersey Commission on Holocaust Education.

We are proud to be a part of a progressive diverse community where being an advocate and an upstander is widely accepted as the norm. We are proud to have a positive relationship with our community Police partners. We need each other now more than ever. Please know that your school district is committed to providing our students with an education that prepares the next generation to lead us to a future that not only acknowledges our differences with empathy and dignity but embraces our diversity as the strength that has the power to truly transform our society.

Sincerely,

Dr. Ronald G. Taylor

South Orange & Maplewood School District, Board of Education