

# Hazelwood School District – Statement of Solidarity

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## Hazelwood School District – Statement of Solidarity

The horrific, depraved murder of George Floyd left many in our community shocked and enraged. That anger has been further amplified by the senseless murder of Breonna Taylor and now Rayshard Brooks, all unarmed African Americans who were killed by the police. These and other recent instances of lethal attacks against African Americans are unacceptable. This is an American issue not a black issue. As such, we all have a collective responsibility to fight against the ills of racism. The Hazelwood School District Board of Education stands in solidarity with the millions of Americans stepping forward in this fight. We stand with our community to say, “enough is enough!”

The simple fact is that systemic racism is prevalent in our society, and the events happening today underscore the re-traumatization that occurs in the Black community whenever another father, husband, son or daughter dies unjustly. It’s unacceptable that our African American students, staff, and their families live with this fear on a daily basis. White supremacy, Black pain from systemic oppression, racial capitalism, and the choice of property over people is jeopardizing the future of this country and our children.

As a society, it’s time to address the underlying conditions that create these inequities - unequal access to quality healthcare, disproportionate poverty, and mass incarceration. Though the 1954 United States Supreme Court decision in Brown vs. Board of Education gave African Americans equal access to an integrated public education, 66 years later, systemic racism in the educational system continues. This is evidenced by the academic achievement gap, the disproportionate number of black children who are suspended or expelled from school, and the ever-growing digital divide. These factors alone should be a rallying call to action!

While no singular institution can singlehandedly produce the societal changes that are desperately needed to remedy social injustice, strong public schools are a vital part of the solution. Education is a civil right, and the work of school boards is vitally important, especially right now. Boards of education are the guardians of the institution that is the greatest equalizer in our society. As school board members, we have a great opportunity and moral obligation to bring about meaningful, positive change so the civil rights of our students and staff are honored.

The HSD Board of Education pledges to our learning community that we will speak firmly against any racism, discrimination and senseless violence against people regardless of race, ethnicity, nationality, immigration status, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity or ability. We will promote racial healing, finally acknowledging the ghost in the room! We can no

longer ignore the obvious or be silent. We must begin to understand each other. Dr. Martin Luther King said, “In the end, we will remember not the words of our enemies but the silence of our friends.”

But this is not enough. Our board of education will continue to work to break down the structural barriers in our educational system. We will seek to achieve greater equity and eliminate systemic racism and harm to our students, staff, and community. The board of education’s statement and stance reaffirms our compact with our learning community. We will:

- Lean fully into the discomfort of racial healing required to build a just and equitable society for our children.
- Continue to engage in our own professional development on diversity and inclusion. The board will charge the superintendent with working to increase diversity and inclusion across the organization including a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion solutions group that sets our strategy as an organization.
- Empower the superintendent and charge her with boldly addressing and correcting institutionalized racist practices that have survived because of a “wall of silence and denial”, against our students and in our schools much like that in police departments. The Board will hold itself and all staff, accountable for the same.
- Review and implement all board policies and practices through a lens of equity.
- Recruit, hire, and promote a diverse staff.
- Promote restorative justice practices across our organization but in particular to reduce disparities around student discipline.
- Engage our students in meaningful dialogue. In recent years, students of color have shared concerns about learning in an environment where they felt unsafe and devalued. All students are entitled to emotional and physical safety. They have a lot to say and are the reason we’re here. We must listen and respond to their concerns. Principally, the board of education believes you can’t lead children you don’t understand and love.
- Reevaluate our relationship with school resource officers. We want to protect our students and staff from external threats but recognize the presence of armed police officers undermines some students’ and staff members’ sense of safety.
- Expand student support services and deepen our partnership with organizations focused on building our understanding of systemic oppression and how it has caused historical and current trauma on our community. We want to better understand the science of trauma, toxic stress, and how to build resiliency in our students and staff.

- For those of us who are white and don't share the experiences of our minority students and staff, we commit to becoming allies in the struggle to foster better understanding and a socially just community.

This work is essential for the very survival of our community! Join us!

For our children,

Hazelwood School District Board of Education