



Georgia Appleseed Opposes the State Board of Education Resolution that Would Prevent Georgia Students from Learning about Racism

June 11, 2021

Georgia's State Board of Education passed a resolution on June 3, 2021, that would prevent teachers from discussing and teaching about racism in Georgia classrooms. The resolution does not direct teachers and schools to make any changes to their curriculum. Nonetheless, it sends a strong message to Georgia's school children and staff—Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) and white—that discussing and learning the historical truth and current reality of racism are not welcome in the classroom. We believe that the resolution was a mistake that harms students. The State Board should immediately repeal its resolution. In its place, the Board should acknowledge racism's detrimental impacts on BIPOC students. Instead of denying racism's existence and impact, the Board should adopt policies that root out racist structures and practices in Georgia's education system and replace them with equitable ones that support BIPOC students.

The State Board's Resolution Allows Racist Policies and Practices to Continue

Denying that racism impacts Georgia's schools and students makes it more difficult for students to succeed. It is now well-demonstrated in Georgia and elsewhere that all children and youth perform best in schools that provide supportive, culturally responsive, and positive school learning climates. Unless school communities openly discuss and challenge racism, our schools cannot provide these learning climates.

The State Board's Resolution Diminishes Trust Among Students & Threatens the Success of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports

The Board's resolution is a significant setback to Georgia's successful efforts to increase student achievement and lower rates of school discipline. Georgia has made remarkable progress in achievement and discipline over the last decade, largely as a result of the statewide adoption of school climate reform. In that time, Georgia has invested heavily in school climate efforts. Currently, over 50% of Georgia schools use a positive school climate model, primarily Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports ("PBIS"). Building on a foundation of honesty and fairness, the PBIS framework builds trust through a school-wide commitment to teach students about expected behavior, to positively reinforce good behavior, and to use critical, objective discipline data to assess and manage the school's approach to student discipline. As a result of PBIS and related investments, learning in Georgia classrooms increased and discipline problems decreased. Tens of thousands fewer Georgia students are suspended and expelled each year and schools see fewer discipline problems overall.

Mutual trust among students, parents, teachers, and school leaders is critical to creating a positive school climate. Trust requires honesty, authenticity, and fairness. Children who trust their leaders or believe that a

system is fair are more likely to respect the rules. Schools with trust and fairness have fewer disciplinary challenges and better educational outcomes. Schools are most successful at building trust when they acknowledge that racism shapes students' lives and identities. Our students know that racism against BIPOC students exists, harms them in innumerable ways, and is a barrier to the success of our schools for all students. Ignoring racism risks teaching our students that they cannot trust their school leaders and that facts should only be accepted if they are politically expedient.

The State Board's Resolution Suppresses Stories of Resistance to Racism

The resolution is harmful in other important ways. For example, the resolution teaches students that BIPOC students' history of resistance to oppression is not worthy of the classroom. Suppressing this history reinforces stereotypes that make the classroom a less welcoming place for BIPOC children. In addition, it closes a critical avenue towards unity and shared identity among students. When our children learn the truth about Georgia's racist treatment of BIPOC children and families, they also learn that today's challenges can be overcome in the future. They learn about the unjust barriers to school success that confront many BIPOC children and their families. Just as important, they learn that BIPOC children and youth succeed and serve as role models and inspiring leaders, despite these barriers. Through these lessons, students develop confidence that they can help themselves, their neighbors, and their communities. By denying the truth that racism is a powerful reality of the past and present, the State Board denies these children and youth optimism for the future. Georgia and the nation's racist history is also a heroic history of resistance—a history that all children should have access to.

The State Board and Governor Should Adopt Policies that Root Out Racism and Its Impacts

The State Board and Governor should seize this opportunity to embrace the teaching of Georgia's untold history. They should publicly recognize that racism is a scourge that can be eradicated, and that doing so would benefit us all. They should lift up BIPOC heroes and allies who struggle against and resist racism. They should offer hope that our present and future can be an equitable one where every child receives the supports that each child needs. And they should adopt practical policy solutions that root out racism and its impacts. If they do, count on Georgia Appleseed to be an enthusiastic partner in that effort.

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