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Dr. Edwin M. Quezada
Superintendent of Schools

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Dear Yonkers Public Schools Learning Community,

It is with mixed emotions that I reach out to you today. However, reach out to you I must. As your Superintendent of Schools, it compels me to share not only what is on my mind concerning our children, but also what is in my heart.

My mind is consumed with the many challenges educational leaders must face during this critical time. These include ensuring our children continue to receive quality distance learning instruction, bringing the current school year to a successful close, and creating a plan containing all the necessary precautions for our students and staff to return safely, upon the reopening of schools.

This important work, however, does not happen in a vacuum. It plays out against the backdrop of major turmoil in our country. We, as Americans, are being assaulted on two fronts: the COVID-19 Pandemic that disproportionately affects the poor and communities of color and the epidemic of violence fueled by a legacy of unresolved racial hatred and distrust. In my heart, I believe that how we as a school system, we as a city, we as a state, and we as a nation respond to these challenges will forever change the soul of America. For our children's sake, I pray it will do so for the better.

It is vital to realize that as we seek to address wrongs and reconcile differences, our children are not mere passive observers in the process. They are making meaning of the world around them. They are making moral choices. They are constructing a worldview. It is our responsibility, our sacred duty, to inform that view with facts and temper it with values.

To do so responsibly we must first educate ourselves, realizing there can be no bystanders. If we wish to preserve the best of America for future generations, we must muster the courage to acknowledge the pain, the trauma, the frustration and outrage that for far too long have been deeply felt by some in our communities, and totally ignored by others.

We must be agents for change modeling for this and future generations peaceful, meaningful and purposeful approaches to living in a diverse society. A society where our differences are not merely tolerated or accepted, they are celebrated as manifestations of the American ideal.

It is painful to see the justifiable outrage of tens of thousands of people of all races, to the systemic problems implicated in the deaths of individuals of color, be corrupted into excuses for violence and looting. This behavior is unacceptable and cannot be tolerated. For us as a nation to come together, to pursue that perfect union, we must teach our children that words and actions create worlds. Words and actions can be used to either hurt or heal.

Our children must understand and embrace that peaceful protest, as a means of promoting societal change, is one of the key principles on which our form of government is based. Our founders contemplated peaceful protest as an outlet for anger and frustration. Peaceful protest opens the door for constructive dialogue to produce real long-term solutions for decades of injustice.

In a series of pamphlets published by philosopher Thomas Paine entitled, "The American Crisis," published from 1776 to 1783, he stated, "These are the times that try men's souls." Those prophetic words still ring true today.

How will you respond to the current crisis for the soul of America? Through education, we provide information and social emotional supports to our students and staff, which is our responsibility. To assist our parents, guardians and grandparents, I have included some resources below, which may be useful in preparing you to discuss these matters with your children. Please feel free to reach out to your principal, school psychologist and social worker for guidance in this area.

I hope and I pray that, although perhaps shaken, you will respond with compassion, with generosity, with love and a relentless commitment to promote the conditions to secure a better life for all our children. If so, you will always have a willing partner in me.

Sincerely,


Dr. Edwin Quezada

C: President Rev. Steve Lopez, Vice President Ramos-Meier
and Trustees of the Board of Education

RESOURCES TO HELP CHILDREN PROCESS CURRENT EVENTS:

- [Classroom Resources from Teaching Tolerance](#) - This is a comprehensive, core-resource that can be searched for lessons, activities, and projects for scholars in K-2, 3-5, and 6-8. There are endless options to create a mini-unit.
- [Middle School Listening Circle on George Floyd](#) - This organization has a series of recommended questions for educators to use in a circle with middle schoolers.
- [Let's Talk: Facilitating Critical Conversations with Students](#) - This comprehensive guide helps guide conversations on challenging topics.
- [YouGov Poll- Fear of Policing](#) - Most middle school math teachers are studying statistics and data standards. Polling is a great way to bring math to life.
- [10 Ways Youth can Engage in Activism](#) - Scholars, particularly our older ones, may be asking how they can have an impact. Here are some ideas.
- [Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What do you See?](#) - This article brings up the importance of naming race in the early childhood levels.
- [Bringing Black Lives Matter into the Classroom](#) - This lesson, applicable in elementary or middle grades, gives recommendations on applying lessons from the BLM movement.
- <https://www.apa.org/helpcenter/kids-discrimination>