

Letting the Light Shine:

Supporting the Brilliance of Black Scholars in LWSD



“As an organization, we have an obligation to be responsive to the needs of all our students while lifting up and elevating our students that have been marginalized both historically and through our current pandemic. I am proud to say that the lives of our black students matter in Lake Washington School District and we have the opportunity to demonstrate that as students return to school. Given the ongoing discussions about race across the country, we must make sure our students of color, and particularly our Black students, know they belong and that our schools are safe spaces for them. As educators, we have the opportunity to create these safe spaces for students that are most likely wondering what school will feel like right now.”

Dr. Jon Holmen, Superintendent

This brief is intended to provide LWSD educators with an overview of best practices in supporting our Black students. Additionally, this brief includes resources that can support educators who are looking to go further in learning about how to ensure that our schools and classrooms are inclusive and welcoming environments that provide our Black students with fertile ground to thrive as scholars, artists, citizens, and leaders.

Best Practices for Supporting Black Scholars

Some common themes emerge when reviewing articles and reports on how educators can best support Black students. Many of these themes resonate with the foundational texts that the Lake Washington School District has been using for professional learning particularly *Courageous Conversations About Race* by Glenn Singleton and *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain* by Zaretta Hammond.

1. Be an inquirer

Awareness, Knowledge

We often use the cycle of cultural competency (or humility) to help us think about the process by which we learn and grow in our understanding of the ways in which race impacts our lives and the lives of others. In order for us to act in ways that support positive changes on behalf of our Black Scholars, we need to develop an inquiry mindset that is curious and humble.



Our work with *Courageous Conversations* has highlighted the **importance of first understanding our own stories and identities** and the ways in which our own history affects our relationships with students.

Sharif El-Mekki, in his article *9 Things Every Educator Should Know When Teaching Black Students*, encourages educators to “**be curious, respectful and knowledgeable about Black history and culture** while maintaining a high sense of humility and curiosity.”

2. Be a champion

Action & Advocacy

Each of our students deserves to learn in an environment that presents culturally relatable **examples of achievement** and success. Each of our students deserves to be supported by educators that **firmly believe that they can achieve and that they are worthy of the support necessary** to reach high goals for success.

Too often, our Black students are not presented with or are presented with narrow exemplars of Black excellence in our society. We need each educator to help foster environments where our students are **celebrated as scholars** and provided with the models and supports that communicate to them that they are **loved, valued, and capable** of reaching great heights.

Zaretta Hammond, in her book *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain*, speaks to the need for educators to be warm demanders. Lisa Delpit describes warm demanders as teachers who "expect a great deal of their students, convince them of their own brilliance, and help them to reach their potential in a disciplined and structured environment."

3. Be a facilitator

Skills, Action & Advocacy

One of the four agreements of Courageous Conversations is to **Stay Engaged**. This agreement is critical at a time when our students are witnessing continual examples of racialized violence. It's natural for our students to want to engage in a conversation about these events. As educators with a mission of preparing each child to become a contributing member of our society, **we have an obligation to facilitate dialogues with our students about race**.

Educators should be prepared to validate the many emotions that our Black students may experience in response to the forms of racism that they are witnessing and experiencing. As warm demanders, it is important not to dismiss our students' emotions but rather to help our students cultivate responses to those emotions that lead students to identify actions that can lead to a more hopeful and positive future.

4. Be a partner

Awareness, Knowledge, Skills

While the adage about students needing to know how much their teacher cares prior to caring about what is being taught still rings true, for our Black students it is absolutely **critical for teachers to intentionally and patiently form relationships**.

Another adage is that parents know their child best. In order to honor this, educators must be willing to listen and trust what parents tell us. Additionally, some students and parents may be reluctant to engage with remote learning not due to technical barriers (Internet access) but rather due to repeated experiences that have devalued their contributions. Teachers should be prepared both to **Experience Discomfort** and to make a genuine investment in time and interest in our students and families.

THE STUDENT AND COMMUNITY SERVICES DIVISION WILL CONTINUE TO PROVIDE RESOURCES AND SUPPORT FOR EDUCATORS WHICH BUILD UPON THE IDEAS OUTLINED IN THIS BRIEF IN ORDER TO FACILITATE THE ADOPTION OF PRACTICES THAT EMPOWER EACH OF OUR BLACK SCHOLARS TO ACHIEVE EXCELLENCE IN LWSO.

Online Resources for Educators of Black Scholars

Black Minds Matter

Teaching Tolerance: Fall 2019

www.tolerance.org/sites/default/files/2019-09/Teaching-Tolerance-Magazine-Issue-63-Fall-2019.pdf

9 Things Every Educator Should Know When Teaching Black Students

Sharif El-Mekki; Education Post: April 2017

<https://educationpost.org/9-things-every-educator-should-know-when-teaching-black-students/>

Rethinking Family Engagement During School Closures

Dr. Rachael Mahmood; Teaching Tolerance: April 2020

<https://www.tolerance.org/magazine/rethinking-family-engagement-during-school-closures>

Why Are Some Kids Thriving During Remote Learning?

Nora Fleming; Edutopia: April 2020

<https://www.edutopia.org/article/why-are-some-kids-thriving-during-remote-learning>

Reopening Schools with a Focus on Equity

Dr. Pedro Noguera; San Antonio Report: July 2020

<https://sanantonioreport.org/reopening-schools-with-a-focus-on-equity/>

For Students of Color, Remote Learning Environments Pose Multiple Challenges

Natalie Spievack, Megan Gallagher; Urban Wire: June 2020

<https://freedomcenter.org/learn/online-learning-resources/>

The Warm Demander: An Equity Approach

Matt Alexander; Edutopia: April, 2016

<https://www.edutopia.org/blog/warm-demander-equity-approach-matt-alexander>

Lean Into The Wind

Oakland Unified School District

<https://www.ousd.org/cms/lib/CA01001176/Centricity/Domain/78/StratPlanV6eWeb.pdf>

Webinar: Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain

Zaretta Hammond

<https://us.corwin.com/en-us/nam/culturally-responsive-teaching-and-the-brain>

National Museum of African American History & Culture

<https://nmaahc.si.edu/>

American History Traveling Museum

<https://www.unspokentruths.org/american-history-traveling-museum>

National Underground Railroad Freedom Center

<https://freedomcenter.org/learn/online-learning-resources/>