

NEA Demands: Justice for Black Lives

August 2023

*As an organization representing public school educators across the country, the **National Education Association** recognizes the need to end institutionally racist systems and policies that have governed our society for too long and kept Black people from full participation in American life.*

For many Black students and families our public schools are the heart of our communities, but far too many have been overlooked, neglected, and forgotten by those in power who choose to bailout greedy corporations and line the pockets of privatizers. We must hold decision makers accountable to the people by reinvesting in policies and systems to achieve healthy and strong schools and communities.

To our Black students, colleagues, parents and families: you matter, your trauma matters, your voice matters, your protest matters, your dreams matter. We mourn with you, we stand with you, and we organize with you to dismantle all acts of discrimination and racism.

Therefore, we demand justice and equity for Black lives in all places and in all forms — in our judicial, education, housing, health and economic systems.

Transforming Policing Policies for Safe and Just Communities

NEA is dedicated to the fair, respectful treatment of all students and a learning environment free from the effects of implicit or explicit bias. We, therefore, support school boards and our affiliates whose experiences with law enforcement in their public schools have led them to question how hiring police officers impacts both students and staff. We support their decisions to adopt policies to bar contracts that appoint police to serve as student disciplinarians — a role they were never intended to serve.

Evidence shows an increase in the presence of law enforcement in our public schools, particularly in schools that predominantly serve students of color. Students of color, particularly Black and Brown students, are referred into the criminal justice system at far higher rates than white students for violations of school discipline policies. There is also evidence that properly trained security personnel working with school mental health professionals and other educators can promote restorative justice practices and foster a safe school community. However, too often the presence of law enforcement personnel in schools results in an over-reliance on these staff to intervene in the discipline process resulting in unwarranted school-based arrests and referrals of students to the criminal system that would not have otherwise occurred.

Whether they choose to utilize school resource officers in their schools or not, we call on all school systems to:

- Conduct a fresh review of their discipline practices and collect data that is constantly and consistently analyzed so that it is transparent to educators, students and parents, whether or not there is evidence of racial bias in student discipline enforcement.
- Review their training curriculum to ensure that all educators, especially those charged with supporting discipline practices, receive training in age-appropriate responses/interventions, cultural competence, implicit bias, restorative practices and techniques, how to differentiate between discipline and crime, and how to respond to each appropriately. NEA and its affiliates already have many of these training modules and we offer our assistance in conducting these kinds of peer-to-peer professional development trainings.
- Assess their schools' climates to determine whether they are supportive of students' needs, such as providing counselors, social workers, nurses and other professionals who can attend to students' social/emotional and mental health needs.
- Review their policies and practices to determine whether referrals of students to be placed in special education programs or referrals for 504 plans are being used as a substitute for more appropriate interventions.

We demand that decision makers at all levels re-examine the role law enforcement in our communities and our public schools to ensure public safety, while dismantling unjust policies designed to disproportionately impact Black and Brown people, such as mass incarceration, militarization of law enforcement, unlawful separation and detention of immigrant children and families and the excessive use of force.

Ways to Get There (Federal):

- Require a federal standard that use of force be limited to only when necessary, as a last resort after exhausting reasonable options, and incentivize states through federal funding mechanisms to implement this standard; require the use of de-escalation techniques, and the duty to intervene; ban the use of force as a punitive measure or means of retaliation against individuals who only verbally confront officers, or against individuals who pose a danger only to themselves; and require all officers to accurately report all uses of force.
- Prohibit all maneuvers that restrict the flow of blood or oxygen to the brain, including neck holds, chokeholds, and similar excessive force, deeming the use of such force a federal civil rights violation.
- Prohibit racial profiling and require robust data collection on police-community encounters and law enforcement activities. Data should capture all demographic categories and be disaggregated.

- Eliminate federal programs that provide military equipment to law enforcement, including to school district police departments.
- Prohibit the use of no-knock warrants, especially for drug searches.
- Change the 18 U.S.C. Sec. 242 mens rea requirement from willfulness to recklessness, permitting prosecutors to successfully hold law enforcement accountable for the deprivation of civil rights and civil liberties.

Ways to Get There (State and Local):

- Pass and implement resolutions and policies that aim to remove, re-balance or limit police/law enforcement/SRO presence in schools and/or end law enforcement practices in schools (metal detectors, surveillance, etc.), while increasing funding for counselors, social workers and other essential school personnel to support the social and emotional well-being of students.
- Adoption and comprehensive implementation of Restorative Justice practices.
- Review hate crimes laws to ensure fair enforcement.
- Adoption of implicit bias, de-escalation, diversity and cultural competence training, amended hiring practices, and strict accountability for police officers.
- Prioritize the implementation of bias-free policing practices.
- Strengthen training and accountability measures for SROs and law enforcement engaging children/students.

Healthy and Strong Communities and Schools

***We demand** a transformative investment in the physical, mental and economic health and growth of Black, Brown and Indigenous communities. That means addressing the clear and consistent ways that corporations have exploited, stymied and stolen the wealth of communities of color — resulting in a frayed network of public services in communities of color, including school buildings lacking clean water, asbestos-free and lead-free facilities, proper heating and cooling and more.*

Public schools, libraries, parks, transportation, housing and public service infrastructure are all part of a network that can energize students and their entire communities.

Ways to get there:

- End corporate subsidies and close tax loopholes for corporations to raise additional revenue to equitably invest in education, health care and other essential public services.
- Enact tax justice by ensuring that the top 1% pay their fair share and utilize additional revenue to equitably invest in education, health care and other essential public services.

- Revise or restructure state and local funding formulas for public schools by supporting racially and socially just funding formulas that remedy pervasive resource disparities based upon race, income and geographic wealth patterns. Both intra-district and inter-district disparities must be remedied to ensure equitable access to high quality public education.
- Ensure the federal government meets its obligation to fully fund education services for all low-income students through the Title I program and condition receipt.
- Ensure the federal government meet its obligation to fully fund all students with disabilities via the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).
- Investment in the federal agencies' Civil Rights Offices to ensure the ability to investigate and enforce all civil rights laws protecting students.
- Increase federal investment in school modernization and construction, particularly in creating green and/or net-zero facilities.
- Close the digital divide and the homework gap by making broadband internet access a public good available to every community, to remedy the disparate access barriers experienced in Black, Brown, Indigenous and remote communities.
- Adopt racial equity principles at all levels of policymaking.
- Address racial inequities in our communities of color as a public health crisis.

Empowering Communities and Schools

***We demand** Black educator and student voices be integral to the decisions that impact their schools and communities. Whether Black, Brown, Indigenous or white, when students, families and educators come together to ensure racial justice in public schools — from pre-K to higher education — it strengthens the whole community.*

Ways to get there:

- Increase recruitment and retention of educators of color, ensuring that leadership opportunities are offered in equitable ways to create reflective education leadership teams at every site and level of public education.
- Implement Ethnic Studies curriculum and culturally responsive education (which can utilize the expertise of trained NEA leaders).
- Implement strong mental health, anti-bullying and trauma-informed education practices (which can utilize the expertise of trained NEA leaders).
- Implement implicit bias, diversity, equity, cultural competence and other racial justice training for all educators (including administrators) and regularly evaluate progress and outcomes in applying racial equity tools to decision-making and practices (which can utilize the expertise of trained NEA leaders).

- Strengthen collective bargaining rights for public and private sector workers.
- Dramatically increase federal investment in and expansion of full-service community schools.
- Implement strong labor-management collaboration systems and practices that apply racial equity tools to decision-making processes and practices.
- Implement policies and practices designed to promote safe and just schools at every level (which can utilize the expertise of trained NEA leaders).

Ensuring the Right to Vote for Black, Brown, Native and AAPI Voters

We demand free, fair and accessible elections that address the long-standing practices of voter suppression and discrimination in Black and Brown communities. While the right to vote is enshrined in the Constitution, politicians have used policies and voter suppression tactics to limit the participation of Black, Brown, AAPI and Native American communities, impeding their ability to have a voice in our government.

Ways to get there:

- Restore and strengthen civics education in public education.
- Declare federal election days as holidays.
- Guarantee automatic voter registration and/or same-day registration, online voter registration and preregistration for 16- and 17-year-olds.
- Make voting more convenient and accessible by guaranteeing no-excuse early voting (in-person and by mail) and extending hours in all states.
- Restore polling places that have been closed in Black and Brown communities.
- End discriminatory voter roll purges and restrictive voter ID laws.
- Ensure ballot materials in multiple languages for all voters.
- Restore voting rights to formerly incarcerated citizens who have served their sentences.
- Increase voter education to inform communities of any new voter registration and voting practices (particularly during COVID).
- Reauthorize the Voting Rights Act of 1965, including restoring and extending the full protections and full enforcement of the act.
- Pass federal legislation that curbs voter suppression.
- Require paper ballots be utilized in all elections, requiring transparent, secure, verifiable systems of counting and recording votes, and ensuring independent, nonpartisan oversight and audits of elections.

- Increase resources for monitoring and combatting efforts — foreign and domestic — to hack or otherwise illegally influence our elections.
- Enact campaign finance reform designed to combat the unchecked influence of corporations on U.S. elections (overturn *Citizens United*).
- Pass a constitutional amendment to give full congressional and presidential voting rights to U.S. citizens in the District of Columbia and U.S. territories.