

Toward an Antiracist South Kingstown

Racial Justice Policy Changes in South Kingstown Schools

A List of Demands



By T.A.S.K.

We are members of the South Kingstown community, Black, White, and Brown, students and parents, youth and elders. We love our town, but we are not blind to the truth. South Kingstown was established in 1723 based on White Supremacist beliefs. South Kingstown has never been a place where Black and brown children have been equal to white children.

We will not pass this legacy on to the next generation. It ends here.

The South Kingstown School Committee has begun a long overdue conversation about racial justice in our schools. Below are the changes that we are demanding to provide the education ALL of our students deserve:

Curriculum

The problem: What we are currently being taught perpetuates racism and bias against Black people, our Indigenous community, and other communities of color.

In elementary and middle school, we learn Rhode Island history with scant mention of the Narragansett and Wampanoags. We learn how great Roger Williams was, but not his complicity in Pequot massacres. We learn of a lively experiment, but not how it was funded by the trade of human beings. We hide from difficult conversations, rather than finding thoughtful ways to teach our children the truth.

In High School, we spend the vast majority of our time studying the deeds of great white men. Freshman year we learn about Western Civilization. Junior year is US History, where Black Americans are portrayed as the victims, saved by Lincoln. Black Americans are the drivers of change only in the chapter on the Civil Rights movement, where we learn a white-washed version of the truth. We study the Boston Massacre, where three Americans died, for weeks. The Great Swamp Massacre (which happened right here in South County) and the Wounded Knee Massacre, where hundreds of Indigenous Americans were killed, and the Tulsa Massacre where hundreds Black Americans were slaughtered, somehow escape mentioning. Global studies, the Black experience, and other courses that teach the history of non-white people are optional, and all taught by white teachers.

Our English classes are full of works by white authors, our science books full of white faces. Where are the Black American, Latinx, Asian, African, Indigenous, Indian, and Arab masters of literature and science? Having "To Kill a Mockingbird" as one option among several for summer reading will not cut it.

When we do not teach the history or contributions of Black people, other people of color, women, and the LGBTQ community, we are reinforcing the idea that white men have been the heroes of history and drivers of progress. That is not true, but that is the message we are sending our students.

The Solution:

- 1) Incorporate the history and contributions of people of color into every course at every grade level.
 - a) Conduct and make public a deep analysis of every course from Kindergarten through senior year. How many of the names in our history, math, and science books are Black? How many are women? How many of the readings we are assigned are by people of color?
 - b) Set a minimum quota: at least 50% of the assigned materials in each course must be by women and at least 50% of the assigned materials must be by people of color. If less than half of the names in our textbooks are women, additional materials by and about women must be assigned. If less than half of the names

- in our textbooks are people of color, additional materials by and about people of color must be assigned.
- c) Measure progress towards the goal with a deadline of 2022 to reach the quota.
- 2) Make a full-year Racial History of the United States course a graduation requirement:
 - a) Hire teachers of color specifically to teach these courses and fund the training they need.
 - b) Consult with other school districts who have done something similar.
 - c) This course should teach history and also teach students how to identify their own biases and skills to overcome them.
 - 3) Offer courses on life skills:
 - a) Provide career and technical training courses for students for whom a four-year college degree is not the goal.
 - b) Teach students life skills like civics, voting, how to research candidates, how to run for office, media literacy, and personal finance. These skills could be taught in Home Room.
 - 4) Teach the science of implicit biases and stereotypes in biology class, and the scientific theory behind these behaviors in psychology and/or sociology class:
 - a) Seek out resources and incorporate this into the biology curriculum as a neuroscience focus (genomic imprinting, epigenetics, blood memory).
 - b) Seek out resources that incorporate this into the psychology and/or sociology curriculum (decision bias, moral hazard and so on).
 - c) Teach students how to identify their own implicit biases as they relate to race and ethnicity, and the skills to overcome them.
 - 5) End racial disparity in honors/AP placement:
 - a) Conduct an analysis of which students are selected for honors/AP courses by race.
 - b) Continue collecting and publishing this data each semester.
 - c) Work with teachers to eliminate bias from the selection process for honors/AP courses.

Representation & Student-Teacher Relationships

The Problem: Our teacher demographics reflect our community, which is about 90% white, more than it reflects our student population. Black and Brown students make up a higher percentage of the student population than the town as a whole, but the vast majority of the role models who teach us don't look like us. This reinforces the idea that white people are the arbiters of knowledge and deprives us of mentors who share and therefore understand our experience. White teachers can have implicit bias, which can affect how they teach and prepare students of color. Studies show that having even one Black teacher dramatically increases educational outcomes for Black students. It also fosters a sense of self-identity and self-assurance which is critical to surviving in the real world.

The Solution:

- 6) Hire more Black and Brown teachers, counselors, career advisors, and sports coaches:
 - a) Conduct an audit and make public an analysis of the current racial breakdown of our teaching, advising, and coaching staff.
 - b) Publish this data at the start of each semester.
 - c) Set as a goal that teachers of color will make up 25% of the teaching force by 2025. Set a long term goal of teachers of color making up 50% of the teaching force.
 - d) Conduct an audit and make public an analysis of the current racial breakdown of the students and of the coaching staff in our athletic programs.
 - e) Set as a goal that the percentage of coaches of color will more closely resemble the percentage of students of color in our athletic programs by 2025.
 - f) Work with the Teachers' Union to establish new rules so that teachers/support staff of color get priority in teaching ethnic studies classes and mentoring students of color in other roles like coaching.
 - g) Work with the Teachers' Union and Athletic Departments to ensure complete transparency in hiring practices of coaches across the school system. Make hiring decisions a matter of public record at every level.

- 7) Enforce Implicit Bias Training:
 - a) Contract with a firm that specializes in sustained, solution-oriented bias training for all administrators, teachers, and support staff. Training must happen at least quarterly and should be incorporated into professional development hours.

- 8) Properly fund and support the English as a Second Language Learning and Dual Language Immersion programs:
 - a) Students whose first language is not English deserve to learn in the language they are comfortable with, while developing their English skills properly.
 - b) Ensure staff working in the ESL program are proficient in the student's first language.
 - c) All students can benefit from the opportunity to learn a second language and exposure to native-speaking instructors and the cultures. The DLI program should be properly funded and advertised.
 - d) Students, families, and staff affiliated with the DLI programs should be properly supported by school and district administration to ensure retention and the long term success of the program.

- 9) Create an independent complaints process so students and staff can report racist, sexist, classist, homophobic, or transphobic conduct from teachers if/when it occurs.
 - a) Designate trusted staff members that students can report misconduct to and assure they are taken seriously. These staff members should be elected by students, as liaisons between students and the rest of the school staff.
 - b) Create a published process of filing reports with guidance counselors, the principal, and school superintendent.

- c) Publish and make available to students faculty and staff, data on reports of misconduct perpetrated by teachers and staff. Also create a way to publish high-level, anonymous data publicly where possible for the benefit of the community as a whole.

Discipline

The Problem: Students of color are disproportionately disciplined in SK schools. Because Black women are hypersexualized from a younger age, Black girls are disproportionately scolded for failing to adhere to the dress code. Because Black and Indigenous boys are often viewed as dangerous, they are suspended at a hugely disproportionate rate. Suspensions cause many more problems than they solve. It is proven that suspensions do not change students' behavior, make students more likely to drop out, and become involved in the juvenile justice system. Zero tolerance policies provide little room to consider individual circumstances or allow for personal growth. Even in our small town, we are contributing to the school-to-prison pipeline and denying our Black and Brown students the educational opportunities they deserve. When you target Black students for discipline, you stifle their education and send the message that this school is not for them.

The Solution:

10) End racialized discipline:

- a) Conduct and make public a full analysis of all disciplines (from verbal warnings to suspensions to expulsions) by race.
- b) Collect this information on an ongoing basis and publish it in real-time.
- c) Immediately analyze why there is disproportionate discipline of students of color and how SK contributes to the school-to-prison pipeline.
- d) Put a one-year moratorium on out-of-school-suspensions for insubordination or "willful defiance," vague offences which have been racially enforced.

11) Create alternatives to suspension:

- a) Study how other states/districts have created alternatives to suspension that have improved student performance.
- b) Strengthen mentorship programs, counseling services, and case management services for students who need a hand up and create specific Student-of-Color-oriented resources.
- c) Create policies that can remove disruptive students from the classroom with the goal of it being a temporary removal: focus on positive behavior support.
- d) Study how other districts have reduced suspensions with a more student-focus.
- e) This begins in elementary school: ensure kids are offered counseling services early and are not put on a "problem student" track.

12) Create an appeals process for disciplines:

- a) Students accused of serious transgressions should be paired with an advocate and allowed an opportunity to contest their discipline.
- 13) Address the underlying causes of disparate disciplines:
- a) Kids can't learn hungry; implement a free breakfast and free lunch program for all students.
 - b) Improve quality/healthiness of meals and ingredients by working with local farms.
 - c) Offer free supplies and resources (discreetly) to students in need.

Accountability

The problem: Too often, we have seen our leaders pay lip-service to equity and justice, but fail to follow through. The above demands cannot be delegated to a committee or left to educators who are already over-taxed and under-resourced. All of this will require sustained effort and attention. We need someone with the expertise and resources to drive the change we need, and we need a sustained student organization to ensure students' voices are heard.

The Solution:

- 14) Create and staff an Equity Office which will be tasked with driving the above changes and given the authority and autonomy to hold decision makers accountable.
- 15) Just like YearBook, SKPades, and the Newspaper have paid advisors, create a stipended position for an advisor for a new student organization: Students for Racial, Social, and Environmental Justice. Prioritize teachers/staff of color when awarding this stipend position.

Student-Student Racism

The Problem: There are repeatedly incidents of racism in the school district between students. Due to student privacy, students that are subjected to racism often do not see the consequences the offending student faces. This leads the student to feel that they are not being protected against racism in the school. Consequences are not uniform across schools and students and parents do not have a clear idea of the consequences. Acts of racism and hate speech are detrimental to a students mental health, ability to learn, and sense of safety/security in schools.

The Solution:

- 16) There needs to be a formal written document sent to all students and parents prior to each school semester which explains consequences for acts of racism and hate speech, outlining that:
 - a) Consequences should be uniform across schools and students.
 - b) There will be no exceptions for students facing consequences for a racially motivated act or hate speech.

- c) The definition of racist acts should include things like racial slurs, symbols used to intimidate (ex. The Confederate flag, swastikas, nooses, derogatory images, etc), racist, sexist or homophobic comments directed at a student of color, and racist-driven bullying.
- 17) Consequences for offending students should include several avenues of restorative justice education and social/emotional learning such as:
- a) Peer mediation where the victim, perpetrator, and designated peer mediators can engage in a dialogue that explores antiracism, empathy, and cultural sensitivity that is both useful to the perpetrator and healing for the victim. This mediation should be optional for the victim but provided as an option.
 - b) A mandatory antiracism course or assignment where offenders learn how to identify their own biases and challenge them, and how to be an antiracist ally. This course or assignment would require them to do research on racial violence and examine its effects, bullying and its effects, and similar interpersonal topics.
 - c) For repeat offenders, consequences should be significant enough to dissuade students from perpetuating the racist acts or engaging in further hate speech. Experts should be consulted to implement evidence-based methods for teaching students to recognize the harm of their actions.

School Resource Officers

The problem: The presence of School Resource Officers (SROs) in South Kingstown high school is intimidating to students, especially our Black and Brown students, because too often they are either the victims of racial profiling, violence and aggression perpetrated by police officers in our community, or in other communities. The anxiety that the presence of SROs creates in students catalyzes a chain of events, which are adversarial to their learning because they affect the students' mental health, sense of security, and well-being. A student who is fearful cannot fully engage in his/her education, and this affects the education outcomes of those students in very profound ways.

Solution:

- 18) Publish profiles of each School Resource Officer present in the schools at the beginning of each semester:
- a) Provide a bio of each SRO using publicly-available information, including years of service, training and specializations.
 - b) Include all SRO activity from the prior semester or prior year, such as aggregate and/or anonymous arrests and offense data.
 - c) Make this data available to faculty, students, and parents.
- 19) Outline a clear list of duties and responsibilities of the SROs, and make it available to faculty, students, and parents at the beginning of each school year:
- a) Duties should include limitations to SRO's authority in the schools, including a strict prohibition on disciplinary authority or counseling duties over students.
 - b) SROs responsibilities should be limited to public safety education, and ensuring safety from external threats against the school; safety lockdowns, evacuations, school, and police response during emergency situations.

- c) For all student-related issues, including verbal or physical conflict between students, student drug use, or any other student behavior, SROs should not get involved unless specifically asked to assist by designated de-escalation staff.
 - d) For all student-related issues, SROs will report to designated de-escalation staff and not their supervisors in the police department.
 - e) Any investigation of incidents or mediation of potential criminal activity should be automatically video recorded by the SROs (by use of body cams, etc).
- 20) Require that SRO complete annual professional development training:
- a) SROs should be trained in Restorative Justice and it should be a major component of how they handle criminal situations in schools. The SROs should be able to show completion of such training or demonstrate competence in it.
 - b) SROs should undergo Implicit Bias training similar to what will be required of faculty & staff, in the interest of maintaining an environment of fair, equal and compassionate treatment of Black and Brown students by all persons of authority in the schools.
- 21) Require that all SROs engage in an orientation and relationship-building activity with all students at the beginning of each school year.
- 22) Require that all SROs undergo peer & student evaluations at the end each semester, to be used as part of their performance evaluations.