



Statement on Racial Injustice June 2020

The recent violent deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Dreasjon Reed and so many more, named and unnamed, have brought racial injustice to the surface of our nation's consciousness in a public and horrific way. To be sure, this systemic racism has always existed, permeating our lives. Only the privileged have been surprised at the outpouring of grief, anger and other manifestations of trauma we are now witnessing across this country.

We, the board of the Indiana Coalition for Public Education, stand in solidarity with these community members proclaiming, "Enough is enough."

Like all aspects of our society and its institutions, public education has its own struggles with systemic racism. Schools are becoming more racially segregated at an increasing rate, even 60 years after the Supreme Court ruled segregation unconstitutional in *Brown vs. Board of Education*. We see racism reflected in such things as lack of access to modern facilities and certified Advanced Placement classes. We see it reflected in disparate racial outcomes in graduation rates, college preparedness and disciplinary actions. We must identify these problems to provide solutions and, ultimately, fulfill the promise of public education as guaranteed for each and every child by Indiana's Constitution.

Public means "all." To find solutions to the systemic racism of our schools, we must continue to have schools remain public and locally controlled. When a community leans in and elects representatives from their own neighborhoods to serve on public school boards, there is an inherent accountability in that leadership. The community can demand that board members share their vision of racial justice and equity, a vision the administration is then obligated to carry out. Antiracist policies, restorative justice policies, the hiring and support of historically marginalized people for teaching and other positions in our schools, relevant and engaging curriculum — these are evidence-based ways to tear down barriers for our children of color. The segregation of our public schools goes hand-in-hand with housing policies, gentrification and the shift to a "school choice" model that has the effect of excluding certain students. While we believe community public schools with democratically elected boards are the way forward, others push privatization.

Privatization occurs when public funding that belongs in public schools and public hands is directed into the private hands of charter, innovation and voucher schools. Charter and innovation schools are outsourced to management companies and marketed as entrepreneurial projects. In reality, children are the guinea pigs of educational experiments. These experiments and privatization efforts are rarely found in largely affluent communities or communities of

majority-white students. Why are our Black and Brown children required to win a competition for excellent educational opportunities through a lottery while their white peers are given the stability of fully funded, resourced neighborhood public schools? If Teach for America novices are acceptable for our children of color living in defunded schools, why are they not acceptable for students in wealthier, whiter communities?

It is time to end policies that disproportionately harm Black and Brown children and the communities in which they live. We stand with the national NAACP and other educational justice organizations such as Journey for Justice, in calling for a moratorium on charter schools (and, we would add, their hybrid — “innovation” schools). We stand with parents of color who ask for the stability of a well-resourced public school, not the empty promise of “choice.” We call for an end to the punitive test-based policies that close neighborhood public schools in our communities of color and turn over control to private hands. Closing schools hurts children and disrupts their education. With the closing of schools across the country in response to the pandemic, we have seen an outcry from parents of all walks of life at the disruption and havoc it has caused their children -- imagine if this happened to them year after year! This opening and shuttering of schools at the whim of the market is disproportionately occurring to our Black and Brown children under the guise of “school choice.” Taking neighborhood public schools with rich traditions, named for Black and Brown community leaders, and rebranding them like a product for the marketplace, erases history and disrespects these communities.

Ultimately, public education is the cornerstone of our democracy. Like our democracy, public education is sometimes messy and flawed, but, in the end, public schools are where the vast majority of our children come together from all walks of life to learn to value and appreciate our differences—and find common ground. Public means “all” and public schools’ mission is to educate and welcome all children. “School choice” purposefully shifts the focus from our collective responsibility to educate ALL children, to the individual choices which benefit a few. Public schools are not businesses, they are the heart of our communities. We at ICPE will continue striving to keep the “public” in public schools and dismantle the racism therein. We must keep that heart beating.