August 24, 2017

Dear County and District Superintendents and Charter School Administrators:

RESPONSE TO CHARLOTTESVILLE

I want to let all California educators, students, and their families know that I reject the hatred, racism, and violence so sadly displayed earlier this month in Charlottesville, Virginia. My thoughts and prayers go out to the family and friends of Heather Heyer, who was killed in this terrible event.

Hateful rhetoric and disgusting, failed ideologies should stay buried in the dustbins of history. We need to join together as Americans and denounce all who preach hate instead of the love, acceptance, and understanding that should define our 21st century.

We must remind California’s school community and our nation that our great state respects, celebrates and embraces our incredibly diverse population. We denounce religious intolerance, racism, and any and all forms of discrimination.

California’s public schools stand proud as a model for the world. Our public school students speak more than 66 languages. Nearly one-quarter of our students are English learners, which means they will soon know two languages. More than half our students are Latino.

As we start the new school year, this is an important time to remind everyone that California maintains strong legal and constitutional protections against discrimination, harassment, and bullying. All students and their families are welcome at school and will be protected regardless of race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, citizenship status, disability, or religious affiliation. This wonderful spectrum enriches our Golden State.

I invite you to explore updated information, lessons, and strategies about how California protects its students. The California Department of Education Web page for Equal Access and Opportunity at http://www.cde.ca.gov/re/di/eqo/ provides extensive resources.

My friend and fellow educator, Linda Darling-Hammond, recently wrote a helpful blog post entitled “Moving Forward from Charlottesville.” Here you can find some terrific examples of resources for students, families, teachers, and others interested in stopping hatred and promoting diversity, acceptance, and respect for others:

• Teaching Tolerance offers a vast wealth of resources and a Learning Plan Builder at https://www.tolerance.org/learning-plan/getting-started to help teachers build lessons around social justice standards aimed at prejudice reduction.

• A Twitter campaign, #charlottesvillecurriculum, is generating a trove of ideas for teaching tolerance, including contributions from the National Council of Teachers of English (Web page at http://bit.ly/2vBZGhW) and Education Week http://bit.ly/2vV5CDV.

Brightly, an online reference for parents, also has relevant material, including “Books to Help Kids Understand the Fight for Racial Equality” at http://www.readbrightly.com/books-to-help-kids-understand-the-fight-for-racial-equality/.

• Unite Against Hate! offers resources for students, educators, and families as they engage in current national dialogue about racism, hate, and bias which are compiled on the National Education Association Web page at http://www.nea.org/charlottesville.

• The Alliance for Excellent Education has produced: "Condemning Racism and Bigotry While Using Charlottesville as a Teachable Moment: Resources for Teachers, Parents, and Others" available at https://all4ed.org/condemning-racism-and-bigotry-while-using-charlottesville-as-a-teachable-moment-resources-for-teachers-parents-and-others/.

• The Anti-Defamation League explains the teachable moments resulting from the recent Charlottesville events in “Lessons to Teach and Learn from ‘Unite the Right’” at https://www.adl.org/blog/lessons-to-teach-and-learn-from-unite-the-right/.

• Future Ready Librarians from around the country are sharing Anti-Racist Resources at https://docs.google.com/document/d/1afj_R5JdDchmLQNQ-6PqVdPHu_VKFOCOThLDn7xyU/edit#heading=h.r8vwscf2y8v in response to the tragic Charlottesville events.

• Common Sense Education provides a list of resources for educators seeking to develop an inclusive culture in their classroom and teach social and emotional skills to students. http://bit.ly/2xwQ9qK
• In “Talking to Children When Hate Makes Headlines,” CNN offers resources to teachers and parents now having conversations about hate and bigotry with children.


• Edutopia’s Web site features “How to Teach Beyond Ferguson,” by José Vilson, a middle school math teacher and coach, who provides tools and strategies for having difficult but necessary conversations.


Sincerely,

Tom Torlakson

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