

Black Students' Lives Matter

Building the school-to-justice pipeline

BY THE EDITORS OF RETHINKING SCHOOLS

How to Make Black Lives Matter in Our Schools

Here are a few ideas for bringing Black Lives Matter into our teaching:

1. Provide a social justice, anti-racist curriculum that gives students the historical grounding, literacy skills, and space to explore the emotional intensity of feelings around the murder of Black youth by police. At the same time, deep discussion of these heavy issues needs to build on strong classroom community. Students can't launch into discussions of racism without a basis of trust and sharing among students and between students and teacher. That is the slow, steady work of meaningful classroom conversation, purposeful group work, reading and writing about critical social and personal issues, shared writing, and more. Teachers need to nurture communities of mutual respect and empathy.
2. Support students who want to have conversations about the Black Lives Matter movement outside the classroom, in school forums or school clubs. Educators supporting the work of BSUs in schools across the country have helped transform the school climate. Black students' sense of pride and self-worth have helped ignite this new civil rights movement.
3. Raise the Black Lives Matter movement with other teachers at our schools and in our unions. It's not enough to provide students with historical lessons. History is being made today by teachers planning Black Student Lives Matter forums and die-ins, advocating for hiring more Black teachers, and participating in many other actions around the country.

This is the moment social justice educators have been waiting for. When pro football players ran onto the field with their hands up in a demonstration of solidarity with the "Hands Up, Don't Shoot" protests that followed Michael Brown's murder, some people in the audience supported them; others were opposed. But everyone knew what they meant. This is a sea change. The topic of police violence against Black people and systemic racism is on the table in a way it hasn't been for a generation. It's time to put aside the test prep and build a school-to-justice pipeline. ■