

# Early Childhood Education Assembly Call to Action Countering Anti-Blackness in Society & Schools

As the Early Childhood Education Assembly (ECEA) of the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), we call all educators to action to shine a light on the injustices that continue to be inflicted on Black bodies. These include the recent deaths of Ahmaud Arbery (GA) who was hunted, gunned down, and ultimately killed for jogging while Black; Breonna Taylor (KY), an essential worker, who was shot eight times in her own home by police officers who raided the wrong home; and Amy Cooper (NY) weaponized her White tears and called police to come and rescue her from a Black man who simply asked her to put her dog on a leash. That same day, George Floyd (MN) died after repeatedly crying *I can't breathe, I am going to die*, and calling out for his mama while a White police officer murdered him by kneeling on George's neck for nine minutes.

According to the National Academy of Science, Black men are 2.5 times more likely to be killed by police during their lifetimes compared to White men. Black women are 1.4 times more likely than White women to be killed by police.

In addition, Black Americans are dying at far greater rates than other races from Covid-19 due to environmental racism, health care inequities, and intergenerational racist trauma that has impacted the health of Black people long before this pandemic.

Time and time again the ECEA has released statements in response to racist, antisemitic, xenophobic, and homophobic events, such as the fatal shooting at Emanuel AME Church, the retention and separation of immigrant children and families, the Orlando shooting, and the fatal shooting at Tree of Life Synagogue. We long for the day when we do not need to write any more statements like this, when we can focus our energies instead on the brilliance, power, and beauty of Communities of Color. That day apparently is not today, yet we have faith that day will come.

As educators, we have a tremendous responsibility to *do something*, no matter how we or our students racially identify. Dr. Martin Luther King stated, "There comes a time when silence is betrayal." When we do not actively teach abolitionism, anti-racism, and counter anti-Blackness *every single day* in classrooms through our attitudes, curriculum, policies, and practices, we are complicit in perpetuating a racist society. National school disciplinary data indicates African American children are disproportionately referred to special education and suspended and expelled in greater numbers even in preschool.

In addition, educators must begin recognizing when we are inflicting further racial trauma on Black children in our classrooms and on Black colleagues/fellow educators. (Resources: [Affirming Black Lives Without Inducing Trauma](#) and [What White Colleagues Need to Understand](#)).

It is important that we stand united and create space in our classrooms, schools, and communities to speak and act against injustice and racism at a structural level. But we first must begin with ourselves, to examine our own privileges, prejudices, and the stereotypes we perpetuate.

Here are some resources for self-examination and to build knowledge:

- [Teaching While White Podcast](#)
- [\*This Book is Anti-Racist\*](#) by Tiffany Jewell
- [\*We Want To Do More Than Survive\*](#) by Bettina L. Love
- [\*White Fragility\*](#) by Robin DiAngelo
- [\*How to be an Antiracist\*](#) by Ibram X Kendi
- [\*Stamped: Racism, Antiracism, and You\*](#) by Ibram X Kendi and Jason Reynolds

Next, we offer some steps and resources to counter anti-Blackness in early childhood classrooms:

- I. Look at the walls of your classroom. Who is represented and how? How are Black communities depicted? (Resource: [Arial Robinson](#))
- II. Look at your picturebooks, library, and curriculum. Whose voices are represented? Silenced? Distorted? How are Black people humanized in your curriculum daily? (Resources: [“We’ve Been Doing It Your Way Long Enough”: Choosing the Culturally Relevant Classroom](#); [Toward Culturally Sustaining Teaching: Early Childhood Educators Honor Children with Practices for Equity and Change](#); [Culturally Responsive Assessments](#))
- III. How do you honor the different ways Black children play? (Resource: [Shaking the bad boys](#): Troubling the criminalization of Black boys’ childhood play).
- IV. How do you honor the experiences, stories, and language of Black children? (Resource: [Educating African American students: And how are the children?](#))
- V. How and how often do you teach about Black history? (Resource: [Anti-Racist Learning and Teaching](#))
- VI. How do you teach social justice in your classroom? (Resources: [Framework for interrupting oppression](#) and [Students Challenge Racist Statues](#)).
- VII. How do you foster Black liberation in your classroom? (Resource: [Using African Diaspora Literacy to Heal and Restore the Souls of Young Black Children](#))

Being anti-racist and working to dismantle anti-Blackness, is not a place at which you arrive, but is work that you do everyday. For schools that would like to dig deeper, we recommend you contact an anti-racism educational consultant.

Remember, as the ECEA has said so many times, as early childhood educators, we have a tremendous stake in the growth of new generations who will be the next neighbors of joggers, police officers, and dog walkers who will or will not value Black lives. The choice is yours.

In the words of Angela Davis, *“In a racist society, it is not enough to be non-racist, we must be anti-racist.”*