

**Q & A from Dr. Khyati Joshi's Parent Session,
Talking to your Kids about Race and Racism
October 6, 2021**

During Dr. Joshi's talk attendees had the opportunity to submit questions. The moderators tried to group the questions by themes to address the majority of inquiries. Here are the promised Q&As organized by themes that reflect ideas that Dr. Joshi discussed and/or responses from the district team.

Questions about the Workshop's Essential Understandings and Terminology

- 1. I realize that the focus of tonight's event is race/racism but isn't focusing only on racial bias a two-dimensional way to deal with bias and systemic advantage/disadvantages present in society based on sexism, anti immigrant sentiment, etc? What about the diversity?**

There are many aspects of diversity that are important to discuss, but with limited time, we chose to focus on race and racism at this time. That does not mean that any other aspects of identities such as gender, religion, nationality, etc. and how these intersect are not important. There are some themes from the presentation about race and racism that could be applied to thinking about other aspects of diversity. For example, helping children to understand their own personal identity, and how they can be more aware of the identities and perspectives of others, applies to discussions about race as well as discussions about other aspects of diversity.

- 2. Will you be using the term 'white privilege' when teaching about racism? Please note that many of us consider that term to be racist itself.**

White privilege is a term that exists and is part of the social discourse. We, as a school system, are committed to preparing our students to think critically in the world that they will inherit. To do that, they will need to learn about ideas and terms that they may disagree with.

White privilege describes the advantages that have been afforded to people who were categorized as "white" by the laws and policies of the United States. It is important to realize that we are teaching about institutional racism and the way that policies and institutions have benefitted some and disadvantaged others.

A high school teacher might introduce the term "white privilege" as a "concept that some social scientists use to describe the collection of advantages afforded to those

categorized as white in American society." The phrase may come up in various texts, articles or primary source documents and analyzed in the context of that source.

3. Why do you only discuss racism as a person of color? Why is anti semitism never mentioned? Is it ok to be anti-semitic?

In her lecture, which was specifically focused on race and racism, Dr. Joshi reflected that there are many different identities that are either advantaged or disadvantaged. No, it is not ok to be anti-Semitic, nor sexist, nor able-ist, nor age-ist, nor any other prejudice. And, as we educate about hatred and acceptance, we will continue to counteract any such behaviors in our schools.

4. Within the white race there are experiences of the same paradigm that you mention influence the socialization of people of color. Based on heritage white people do face the same paradigms. Why are we not discussing this but instead grouping all white people in the same bucket?

Dr. Joshi discussed the complex dual roles we experience as individuals that are based on a variety of aspect of our identities, including race, class, sex, religion etc. During the lecture she discussed the way in which institutions have favored certain groups. The "buckets" you describe are actually "buckets" of people who have benefited from these institutions. Dr. Joshi discussed that white people can experience disadvantage based on other aspects of identities such as gender, class, religion, nationality. In our schools we focus on the students' full identities and encourage them to be proud of who they are and to learn about and appreciate who their classmates are.

5. Privilege=not having to be aware and vigilant of social cues and signals that non-privileged people must be. Discomfort in talking about race: Threat= lacking language, fear of discovering I've been wrong, taken for granted social hierarchy that provided comfort might be wrong.

Many people express a fear around broaching these subjects because they don't want to make a mistake. As with all we do, we want to foster a growth mindset, an ability to learn additional perspectives, around talking about race, and racism.

6. When racism gets commingled with gender, or for that matter any other disadvantaged groups, the effects can be exponential. Would you elaborate on how this can be tackled as we expose our kids to their privilege or lack thereof.

The intersectionality of identities is complex and produces unique combinations of advantages and disadvantages. Our hope is that this process is just the beginning. As we learn more and our staff and students become more sensitized to the issue, we will be able to delve deeper and broaden our understanding. Therefore, it is important not to

fall into the trap of thinking that you can fully understand the lived experience of someone else. This is an important part of our work. Ultimately we want our students to learn to listen to and respect people whenever they share their lived experiences and the unique combination of identities they possess with others.

- 7. Thank you! I've read your book and learned so much about the structures of white Christian privilege that are embedded in our American law, social structure, culture and institutions. In the book and your talk tonight you do also tie in LGBTQ as well. Do you also see the similarities for our special needs students? Do you discuss this with educators and students too?**

While the topic of her talk was race and racism, Dr. Joshi's work with teachers does not focus solely on race, but includes other identities, including those you mention.

- 8. Please define white privilege.**

Dr. Joshi introduced the notion of a system of "advantages" and "disadvantages" as a way of understanding this term. For further understanding of this term and its history, we recommend reading [What Is White Privilege, Really?](#)

Additionally, here is a starting point from Merriam-Webster's "the set of social and economic advantages that white people have by virtue of their race in a culture characterized by racial inequality".

<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/white%20privilege>

- 9. Can you comment about people of color being biased or using stereotypes about white people? Prejudice is an equal opportunity problem!**

Our work is rooted in making our schools and classrooms places where each student's identity is affirmed through the physical environment, interactions and relationships among students and teachers, the curriculum, resources and materials, and methods of instruction. The use of stereotypes to demean or denigrate any aspect of a student's identity, regardless of that identity, is not acceptable in our schools or classrooms. We all have and have experienced prejudice. This work is to help us uncover our own biases, no matter what our own identity.

- 10. It seems the lecture's references to racism only applied to people of color and white youth's ambivalent or ignorant response. Why was there no discussion of white youth or perceived white youth who have experienced the same racism? I am a mixed woman who has experienced racism but am perceived as "white." To assume I don't understand because I look white is essentially racist, is it not?**

Dr. Joshi divided the talk into three different needs in talking about racism with your children – for White families, for families of color, and for mixed race families. And to answer the last question, We are not making assumptions about whether anyone understands, and allow each person to engage where they are.

Also in cases of “reverse discrimination” Our work is rooted in making our schools and classrooms places where all students’ can belong to a safe community while respecting each other’s differences. Everyone has and has experienced prejudice, and that our work is to uncover our own biases.

11. How do you align making white culture “not the norm” vs. the concept of cultural appropriation?

Cultural appropriation is when one (usually dominant) culture takes on the practices or behaviors of another culture without truly understanding or appreciating that culture. As we identify our community as multicultural and multi-racial, we hope to allow each of those present to lift up their own cultural behaviors, and provide a space where we can learn respectfully about others’.

12. How is what you are discussing different from Critical Race Theory?

Dr. Joshi emphasized that CRT is a methodology not an ideology. It is a mechanism to contextualize laws during the time period in which the laws were enacted.

[Click here](#) for a helpful resource from the New Jersey School Boards Association.

13. I think it would really help me to hear more examples of “quieter” bias/racism like the teacher making kids bring in just 1 family object. Can you suggest books or resources?

Some examples that have been felt by students in our system and reported nationally are: Teachers not expecting certain students to be on a college track, or to be able to get into certain levels of classes/colleges; surprise at high achievement on standardized tests, discouragement from taking AP classes, lifting up less familiar celebrations or holidays and making students stand out as representatives of their diversity, kindly meant statements such as, “That is such an interesting name, how do you pronounce it?” and then apologizing for mispronunciation, rather than working on it.

14. As a white German, Irish, English, Scottish American who married a 100% Greek American whose family never recognized my culture, how do we teach in a way that color doesn't mean oppressor?

We do this by recognizing that diversity is a strength and finding ways to celebrate our common humanity while making efforts to understand how our differences strengthen our community. Oppressor is connected to power and historical context. It is important to understand history, at age appropriate times, so we can do better as citizens of the world.

Questions about Staff Professional Development

15. For the educator who experienced the training: What was the idea or teaching techniques that you found most beneficial?

The educators have not yet completed the training, but the answer to the question would likely depend on the educator's own identity and life experiences, including their professional practice.

16. Based on your training in other districts, what measurable changes have you seen (in teaching staff and students)?

Dr. Joshi discussed how she developed a data collection tool with a colleague from Ryder University. In the data she collected she discussed that change could be measured with groups that she worked with. She did not share the specifics from the findings. She did reference other research studies throughout her talk. SPF has not contracted her for the data collection. However, the equity work that the district has focused on does have measurable outcomes. Such as, the changing diversity of our staff and The district will be designing metrics to show changes over time such as – decreased HIB cases and other behavioral concerns, increase in diversity of AP and honors classes, proportional representation in our Quest program, and proportional participation in extracurricular activities.

Questions about Student Learning

17. Will you teach that “affirmative action is considered by many to be a racist policy?”

This topic continues to be a source of national debate. Students are taught to be critical thinkers and can argue a topic from multiple perspectives allowing them to develop their own informed position on a topic. A high school student should be able to explore these complex questions: Are affirmative action policies justified to ensure opportunities for traditionally underrepresented groups? Or do they result in engineered outcomes that result in discriminatory policies toward other groups?

18. In what class or classes is this subject taught and how do we exclude our children from Dr. Joshi's racist views?

We reject that Dr. Joshi's views are racist. We selected her to present to our community because of her national reputation on confronting racism, and because of her work in our and nearby communities. We are reflecting a state mandate and the express dictates of the law. We would not invite someone whom we considered racist to teach our staff and faculty how to combat racism.

The human experience is part of all aspects of our curriculum. Topics related to race and racism are taught in various grades and content areas based on the NJ State Learning Standards. In March of 2021, Governor Murphy signed into law A-4454, which requires school districts to teach about diversity and ensure students have access to equitable and inclusive learning environments. In addition, our curriculum adheres to the following laws:

- NJSA 18A:4a-2-4 Requires all schools to have course of study in the Holocaust and other Genocides.
- NJSA 18A 52:16A-86 Establishes the Amistad Commission to promote the teaching of the history of African Americans as an integral part of United States History.
- In March of 2021, Governor Murphy signed into law A-4454, which requires school districts to teach about diversity and ensure students have access to equitable and inclusive learning environments.

19. Can we introduce at elementary school about different cultures: their food, festivals, hair color appearance and though it's different we are all the same we are all friends.

Yes, and the district will continue to plan events where we celebrate our diverse cultures.

Teaching about diversity and working towards equitable and inclusive school cultures are different, yet related areas of our work. We believe that students cannot truly learn about themselves unless they learn about others as well. As such, we have a strong commitment to providing all students with "windows" and "mirrors" through what we teach and the resources that support that teaching. "Windows" provide the opportunity for students to learn about people and places beyond their experience and "Mirrors" provide students with the opportunity to see themselves reflected in the content being studied.

- 20. How can we (or the teachers) work on starting to implement the notion that we are all deserving of the same respect, at a young age (like 5-6 yrs old)? My son went through a hard time, specifically about the food he would bring to lunch at school and was made fun of, a lot...all because it was different. Sorry for any misspelling, not an American native speaker!**

Thank you for this question and for sharing what was a difficult experience. It is gratifying, and shows that we are moving in the right direction, that we have created an environment that you can self-identify as a non-native speaker.

We understand that the behavior of our staff and faculty can have a great deal of impact on our children. It is important for parents to partner with teachers and share their experiences and what they are hearing from their children and others. Teachers should work to encourage a culture of respectful curiosity about difference, and work against people being put down for what might seem odd. The goal is to celebrate and understand difference, rather than ridicule it.

In the social studies curriculum students learn about the ways that they are similar to and different from one another, and the ways that cultures can be both unique and share characteristics. The Social Emotional Learning Competencies require us to teach students to be respectful of our differences. We use various read alouds such as The Sandwich Swap to help students think about the ways they can respectfully interact with each other especially during lunch. We can model for students how to be respectful but also curious about each other's cultures.

- 21. My son had a social justice reading assignment where he was told to pick a book to read that he could identify with, from a group of titles provided by a teacher. As a white male child he was unable to identify with any of the books that the teacher offered. How is this inclusive?**

We are certainly sorry that your child had this experience. We want our schools and classrooms to be places where students can share this kind of experience with his/her teacher and classmates in a safe and inclusive environment.

That said, we also want students to know that there are many different ways one can identify with a book. Students can identify with a common interest – such as sports or reading; family structure, even other interests like music or travel; or a situation like being wrongly accused of something, being in the wrong place at the wrong time, or learning a secret; or feelings like being bored, lonely, or in love for the first time. All of these can cross gender, race, and socio-economic lines and serve to build a shared sense of common humanity.

22. How will this be taught to the kids and at what grade level?

We hope to prepare our students to engage in a diverse world and, as such, will engage studies of similarity and difference in all parts of the curriculum and, as important, in the behavior modeled by staff and faculty.

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23. Will teachers be asked to proactively talk about race?

Dr. Joshi is engaging teachers in workshops of talking about race, elaborating on many of the messages she shared this evening. Topics related to race and racism are taught in various grades and content areas based on the NJ State Learning Standards (see answer above).

24. Shouldn't this be a parent role? Dr. Joshi said she wouldn't want to be told what to think, but isn't that what our school system is doing?

Schools teach history and racism is part of that history. Topics related to race and racism are taught in various grades and content areas based on the NJ State Learning Standards.

The curriculum is developed based on state and national mandates, and the work of our Board of Education, through public input including Strategic Planning. We hope that our schools and teachers teach in partnership with parents and families, and that students reflect upon what they have learned with their family. Curriculum materials are available for review on our website at spfk12.org. We try to be as transparent as possible, so parents can engage with their children in the subjects that they are learning. Teachers are also available, not for critique of the curriculum, but to parents who have questions in order to better understand what is being presented in class.

25. Thank you! Can you please put together titles of books that educators could read to help facilitate deep conversations?

The district is building diverse libraries supporting the concept that students can see themselves (mirrors) in the literature and understand their world (windows). There are many groups in our community engaging in this work who have resources, such as the [REAL Parents x SPF](#), [Social Justice Matters](#), [Learning for Justice](#) provides a number of resources for educators interested in learning more.

26. You talk about recognizing differences and not being blind. I always tell my kids that each individual is different and should be judged by their actions. However in today's world how can that be properly explained and implemented? Everything seems to be lumped into groups or types or classes of people. How can kids properly react to individuals?

There is a human reality that we tend to classify people and things in order to help us to understand the world around us. The best practice is to realize the limitations of that classification and to treat each person as we would wish to be treated.

Also, we can teach them that each individual possesses a unique combination of identities and to help them learn about all identities

Questions about School Climate/Student Behavior and Bullying

27. Do you seek inclusion or special treatment?

We seek equity. We believe that all students have a right to learn in equitable and inclusive classrooms that foster a sense of belonging. We endeavor to have our classrooms be places where each student's identity is affirmed through the physical environment, interactions and relationships among students and teachers, the curriculum, resources and materials, and methods of instruction.

28. If kids are bullied in school how do you talk to them? How do you make them understand the situation? How to handle the entire circumstances?

Bullying and other student conflicts are handled based on the unique circumstances of each and typically include School Counselor/Student Assistance Specialist intervention.

When situations cause disruption or interference with the orderly operation of school or the rights of a student, and are reported to have been motivated by a distinguishing characteristic, these are investigated and responded to via the Harassment, Intimidation and Bullying Policy.

Parents/Caregivers may find the [resource here](#) to be helpful when trying to support their own children.

29. When an incident of racism occurs in our schools that deeply affects a child of color how can we ensure that student feels heard and how do you deal with it? How do we then use it as a teaching moment for our other students?

First, we recognize that silence and inaction in response to incidents of racism reinforces the status quo and can communicate to students of color that racism doesn't matter enough to warrant attention. We also recognize that in addition to the hurt caused by an incident, our lack of response to it can also deeply impact a child of color while at the same time sending a message to others that we condone racism in our schools. We are using case studies to help build all of our staff members' capacity to truly detect the teachable moments that present themselves in our schools and classrooms and to prepare to address these in ways that lead to learning and changed behavior.

We are learning as we do, and appreciate any help in this area, partnering with parents and other adults in the community.

Questions about Parenting

30. How do you respond to your 6 year old who does not want to take "Indian/ethnic" food for school lunch saying all his friends will ask him what that is?

During her lecture, Dr. Joshi shared the importance of partnering with teachers and administrators in addressing situations like this. Teachers and other school staff can be important allies to families in such situations and Dr. Joshi regularly shares strategies that teachers and other school staff can use to address this.

Also, talk with your child to ask whether they think their friends would ask "what that is" out of curiosity or in order to shame. Help them to feel proud in sharing their own culture and heritage, as well as their ideas in school settings.

31. How to teach an elementary school child about racism?

Start by watching television/movies with them and asking them what they're seeing. Talk to them about what they see in the world. As you practice these conversations they will come more naturally. Don't be afraid to talk about racism. Make the conversation more comfortable and about observation and empathy.

32. When a situation arises in which your white child says something or does something they don't know yet is harmful to a BIPOC student in front of you, what is a safe non-traumatic way to correct them/ acknowledge it and move forward in a better way?

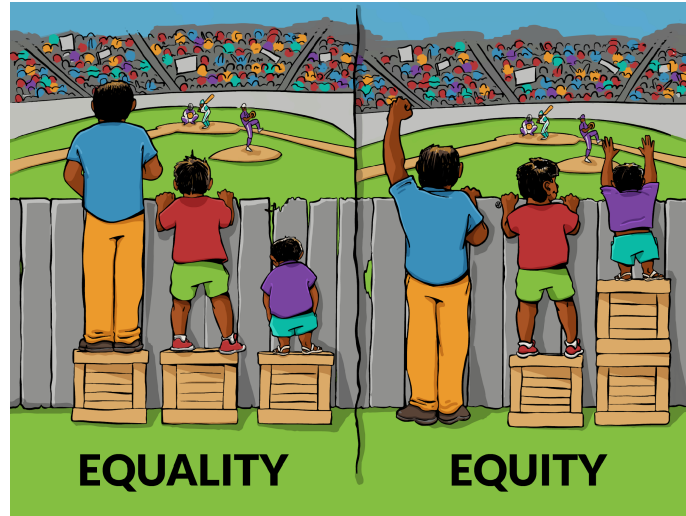
Talk to them and ask them why they said what they said, or thought what they thought. Often there is a reason behind what they've said and talking about it will help you talk to them. Sometimes a white child might ask a brown child if they bathe, but when you ask them why they said that they say, "Their skin is brown and dirt is brown." They are piecing together their observations about the world. You don't have to have the perfect answer at that moment, it will come with practice. So, practice the language and the words will come. Also, It is not a bad practice in the moment to say something like, 'That is not a nice thing to say, we'll talk about it later,' or 'We don't say things like that.' It is important to openly acknowledge what is said in the moment for the sake of the other person and for the sake of the child who said it.

33. What is the #1 thing I can do as a white American mom to instill antiracist behavior in my 6 and 7 yr. olds?

Start by watching television with them and asking them what they're seeing. Talk to them about what they see in the world. As you practice these conversations they will come more naturally. Also, make observations of the world around you and what you notice about fairness. Learn to ask the question, "Who is in the room, and who is not? Who is speaking up and who is not being heard?"

34. Can you please share insights on how to effectively speak to young children about equity vs. equality (that sometimes being unequal is actually more equitable)

A great place to start is to help young children develop an understanding of "fairness." Without intentional teaching, young children often come to understand that "fair" means "equal." Helping young children learn that fairness means treating people according to their needs and that it does not always mean "equal" is something that we work on from the earliest years of a child's education. The graphic below demonstrates the difference between the terms well.



- 35. As a woman who grew up in India I feel quite comfortable in my skin. I have never experienced racism. But my American born son has already? How do I help him deal with this (an experience I've never had myself?)**

Talk to him about how he is feeling, the more practice you have with these conversations, the easier it will be. While you may not have experienced the same kind of bias as your son has, we are all members of privileged and/or disadvantaged groups and there is some aspect of that experience that you can tap into. Also, It is ok to admit there are things you do not know. Learn with him.

- 36. What are some examples of talking about race in a positive way? Afterall you can't brag about being white or compliment a racial group at the risk of promoting a stereotype.**

Race is a social construct, and there may not always be a way to talk about it positively. We can talk about the achievements of individuals, and even groups of individuals, who may share a common characteristic – like the Tuskegee Airmen.

When we recognize race as one of many identities that each of us possesses and talk about how our combination of identities makes each of us unique we learn about ourselves and others and develop a positive social identity.

White students have other identities to be proud of besides their race. Like being Italian, or Russian, or Jewish, or left handed, or red-headed, or a musician, or an athlete, or an artist, or

37. How can I as a white parent express my desire to be an ally without inadvertently coming off as suffering from “white savior complex?” I want to help without centering myself which I know can be detrimental.

You can't, always. What is important is to be humble and realize that even if you want to engage in this work, the other person may not want to do it, in that place, at that moment. Trust is about relationships, and that takes time, patience, and humility.

One of the ways that parents can be allies in this work is by acknowledging the identities each possesses and discussing the advantages and disadvantages that are assigned to those identities and discussing how those advantages and disadvantages impact them.

38. What language do you recommend your white child say to his non-white friends when they are calling each other the n word?

It is never appropriate for a white child to use the n-word, no matter what their friends may say. And it is also probably not their place to lecture them about their own use of the n-word. But he/she could ask them about it in a non-accusatory way (why they use this word, what it means to them, etc). However, if the non-white friends are not Black and are using the n-word, then this is definitely a situation when your son/daughter should talk with his/her friends about why it's not okay to use this word.

39. What do you say to parents who fear that social justice education will teach their kids that whites are monsters?

It is important to remember that when we consider the idea of privilege we are looking at the ways in which institutions have created privilege, not how individuals have commanded privilege. Social justice education is a way to reconcile historical inequities but it is not intended to demonize individuals who have benefitted from those inequities.

40. (I'm white) I try to read books about race to my children, talk about race in age appropriate ways and teach my kids about how to be an ally. One of my children seems to resist these conversations and does not want to read or talk about these topics. How do I address this?

- a. Gently persist in the effort
- b. Engage in conversation
- c. Ask questions

Their attitude may change. What is important is for you to model acceptance and understanding of others.

41. What additional resources can we read/ review to assist our children? How do we help, in a situation where we witness racism in real time, during a playdate, without telling them what to do?

Engage in conversation even if you don't have the answers and talk about what makes you uncomfortable.

42. I am white, Puerto Rican, my spouse is white, european, our adopted daughter is mexican. How do we model culture for her to make her proud of her ethnicity?

- Learn her Mexican culture with her and for her - celebrate who she is!
- Share and celebrate your cultures that all combine to make your family. We can't answer that question for you, it is an exploration that you will have to make together. Be open to exploration and adventure.

Questions about Dr. Joshi and Her Work

43. I'm reading some of your teachings. There appears to be a view of judgement against certain religions. As someone who practices and educates inclusion, can you explain these positions which are counter to the concept of non-judgement and inclusion?

Acknowledging privilege is not to criticize those who benefit from it, unless they do not acknowledge it.

We believe no religion is either inferior or superior to any other.

44. Did you experience bullying and harassment from blacks while growing up in Atlanta? Can blacks be racist and discriminate? What safeguards should exist or be developed to the so-called oppressed from becoming the oppressor (i.e. History of Liberia) –

Discrimination of any sort should not be tolerated. We cannot answer for Dr. Joshi, but encourage you to read her published works to see her commitment to understanding others and promoting anti-racism. There is certainly oppression that exists outside of racism, including economic, country of origin, gender, religious and tribal difference, etc. That is a larger question which we hope to address, but some of it may be outside the context of our school system.

Other Questions

45. Why wasn't this made available to everyone through a Zoom meeting? You give the impression there is something to hide. I am sure many would like to know more but are left in the dark.

A virtual option was not possible. In our agreement Dr. Joshi stipulates that there are no recordings. Also, there is a certain civility and connection that is easier face to face, especially on more challenging subjects.