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June 5, 2020

Michigan Council for Teachers of English Statement on Anti-Racism

We, the Executive Committee of the Michigan Council of Teachers of English (MCTE), stand in solidarity with the global outrage over the state-sanctioned violence and anti-Black racism that have led to the recent deaths of U.S. Black citizens, Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Tony McDade, Renisha McBride, Aiyanna Stanley Jones and all victims of racist violence throughout our country's history, including Dr. Ossian Sweet, Addie Mae Collins, Denise McNair, Carole Robertson, Cynthia Wesley, and Emmett Till. As an organization, we acknowledge that racism is deeply entrenched in the fabric of our country, and systemic racism contributes to inequalities in education, housing, employment, wealth, healthcare, and policing. We recognize that white supremacy is a key driver of racism, and it is important to name it in our efforts to move toward antiracism.

As an organization of English educators, it is our responsibility to use literacy to work toward dismantling the systemic racism that leads to racial disparities in our communities and classrooms. Like communities and schools throughout this nation, the state of Michigan struggles with racist policies and practices that marginalize and harm BISOC (Black, Indigenous, Students of Color). This is evidenced by the Flint Water Crisis, an act of environmental racism and state violence that caused long-term health effects on Flint's children and their families after they were exposed to lead poisoning when state officials switched their water supply. This is also evidenced by the Detroit Right to Literacy case where a group of Detroit students filed a lawsuit against the state of Michigan for a fundamental right to literacy (see Gary B, et al. v. Whitmer, et al.). Students should not have to fight for clean water, a basic right to literacy, or a right to live!

In recent years, MCTE has provided our members with workshops and co-hosted events in an effort to move toward addressing racism and other forms of oppression in the literacy classroom. Even so, we acknowledge that we have struggled with interrogating our organization's whiteness, and we have



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failed in being proactive and active in advocating for antiracism and equity and diversity within our organization, schools, and in public forums. It should not have taken the recent deaths of our Black citizens to write this statement publicly denouncing racism, specifically anti-Black racism, and affirming that Black Lives Matter. We see how our organization's inaction and silence contributed to the very racial disparities we are committed to dismantling. It was Maya Angelou who said "when you know better, you do better." We know better, and we will hold ourselves accountable to doing better.

We affirm our support for NCTE's statement against racism and commit ourselves as an organization to use our platform to advance antiracist programming to bring humanity and dignity to our colleagues, our schools, our state, and all our students. Additionally, MCTE is committing to: (1) using our platform to address racial violence and inequities in communities and schools throughout Michigan, and (2) dismantling racism within our hearts, actions, and institutions, whether overt or expressed through the everyday centering of whiteness through our curriculum, instruction, choice of texts, and institutional policies.

It's not enough to simply make a statement of our principles. We will hold ourselves accountable for not only condemning racism, but also in actively engaging in antiracism programming and planning. As an organization, we pledge to:

- Commit to doing a self-study of our organization that helps us to better understand our own systemic racism and whiteness.
- Create an organizational climate that values inclusivity and equity by reflecting upon and decentering the overwhelming presence of whiteness in our organization's practices to instead develop organizational practices that amplify all marginalized voices.
- Expand, emphasize, and resource our ongoing work in diversity, inclusion, justice, and equity (dije) with an enduring support for dije programs within the organization and in our communities.
- Encourage and support participation and leadership roles for a wide representation of teachers from underrepresented areas in Michigan, committing ourselves to build our membership in ways that reflects the vast diversity of our state.
- Become an active voice in public forums in our profession, our state, and beyond for anti-racism, and advocate for BISOC in public forums.
- Seek out and engage with other antiracist community and professional organizations in Michigan to build partnerships as well as align our efforts with the national demands of organizations like Black Lives Matter at School.
- Engage in, and encourage culturally relevant, antiracist pedagogies, and social justice in classrooms throughout Michigan and beyond.
- Build our major events, including our annual MCTE Conference, around themes of antiracism, equity, inclusivity, and social justice, and recruit keynote speakers who exemplify these ideals.
- Recruit and encourage students from marginalized communities to consider teaching English language arts and build programs to support these growing professionals in their paths.