

Addressing Racial Harassment in a Newly Integrated School District: Choose Your Own Equitable Adventure

Setting: *This school year, 30 new Black students are attending Midwestern Rural School District, a majority white school district, as a result of a new voluntary bussing program aimed at racial integration across the district's 20 schools. On the bus and in the hallways, a group of white high school students, who have been together since kindergarten, are directing racial slurs at some of the Black students—a form of racial harassment that is contributing to a climate in which many Black students are feeling unsafe in their new high school.*

Scenario*: Midwestern Rural School District (MRSD) had been operating under de facto¹ racial segregation for years. To address allegations of perpetuating racial segregation, MRSD conducted data analyses to determine the degree to which their schooling community was segregated along race and income, as well as administering school climate surveys and analyses of academic disparities to assess feelings, attitudes, and academic outcomes. After these activities it was determined that the district had indeed been engaging in policy and practices that did not foster an open, welcoming, accessible environment for non-white students, especially those who were low-income. The lack of educational equity² would soon be evident when MRSD began to implement their solution.

As a result, MRSD put in place a plan to begin bussing Black students from nearby urban districts. At the high school specifically, almost immediately, white students on the bus and in the hallways began harassing the Black students with threats of physical violence and racial slurs—including one white student writing racial slurs and threats of physical violence on their arm and posting it to their personal social media. The Black students came together and reported this harassment to the building principals, but have not felt acknowledged. The Black students finally came to you, their classroom teacher, for guidance on how to be supported.

***Note:** *This scenario is based on actual events; however, some details have been altered for instructional purposes. For context, please see Krug, 2024 in the references.*

¹In fact; to decide to discriminate and self-segregate (Diem, 2019; Rothstein, 2017)

²When educational policies, practices, interactions, and resources, are representative of, constructed by, and responsive to all people such that each individual has access to, can meaningfully participate, and make progress in high-quality learning experiences that empowers them towards self-determination and reduces disparities in outcomes regardless of individual characteristics and cultural identities (Fraser, 2008; Great Lakes Equity Center, 2012).

First, a note: What is the difference between intent and impact?

One's **intent** is typically driven by **goals that inform an action**. **Impact** is the resulting **effect of the action**. Sometimes, our goal-based actions are in misalignment with the effect of those actions. In these cases, it is important to consider how your actions were received, rather than focusing on what you *meant* to occur; resistance to [critical self-reflection](#) may reflect that the motives of your intent were self-serving, rather than for the benefit of others.

“I’m sure the principal is taking care of it. Don’t worry.”

Intent:

- You are offering reassurance that action is taking place on the students’ behalf.
- You hope to impart your faith in the system onto the students.

Impact:

- You may become yet another authority figure whom the students perceive does not take them seriously.
- Your lesson could be perceived as unquestionable faith in authority, perpetuating a lack of student autonomy.

Critical Reflection toward Becoming an Authentic Accomplice

In what ways can you be an active and present educator to minoritized students experiencing oppression in the schooling environment? How might you support students and families in holding the school/district accountable?



Offer the students a space to vent with you after class, proposing solutions on how to navigate the situation themselves.

Intent:

- Talking through issues with students offers them a safe space to share and be validated for their concerns.
- Exercising your management skills and imparting tools with the students to navigate their issues is part of your mentorship.

Impact:

- You are inadvertently creating an insular space that does not address the actions of the students who are the aggressors.
- While it is important for Black students to learn these skills, focusing on their skill-building as a single strategy to address the core issue removes the responsibility of the school/district.

Critical Reflection toward Becoming an Authentic Accomplice

How can you use your authority to pursue what the students are conveying to show that you are serious about the concerns they have shared?



Strategize with students and their families about how to speak to the school principals and the school board about the best ways to address these issues. Engage other educators by leveraging MAP Center resources like Centering Student Voice in Leading for Equity to inform policy and practice.

Intent:

- You show that you both take their concerns seriously and you are willing to put yourself on the line to help them address these issues.
- You demonstrate the seriousness of the issues at hand through action.

Impact:

- Students and families feel wholly supported.
- You set a standard for teachers and principals that complaints such as these should be taken seriously and addressed swiftly.

Now what?

Action Steps to Becoming an Authentic Accomplice

- Practice and exercise critical consciousness to be proactive and not reactive to issues of inequity.
- Learn the difference between [ally and accomplice](#); understanding the difference will help you decide the extent of your actions.
- Be sure you know your district's stance on [student protest, activism, civil rights](#), etc. so that you can help make informed decisions, keeping yourself and your students physically safe and abreast of your rights.
- Foster [safe, inclusive environments](#) that prevent racial oppression, as well as other types of oppression.

Meet the Author

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Recommended citation: Jackson, R. G., Thorius, K. A. K., & Skelton, S. M. (2024). Addressing racial harassment in a newly integrated school district: A choose your own equitable adventure. *Equity Express* [Newsletter]. Midwest & Plains Equity Assistance Center.

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