

EDUCATION/HIGH SCHOOL

Seattle Teachers Plan Black Lives Matter at School Week

From Feb. 5–9, Seattle teachers invite families to participate in a national movement to discuss race, racism and inequality

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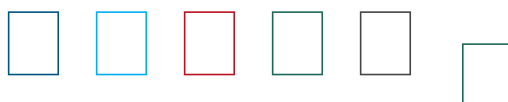




PHOTO: Reminiscent of similar marches in Seattle, students take to the streets in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Photo credit: Fibonacci Blue, flickr

Last month, a biracial fifth grader in North Seattle discovered his science project, saved on a classroom computer, had been replaced by a Klu Klux Klan (KKK) photo captioned “We are here.”

“Unless we actually talk about race, this stuff will continue,” says his mother, marriage and family therapist Hilary Patterson, who is **Black**. “We all have a responsibility to work for racial justice and support our students’ developing awareness of *why* we as **Black** people are forced to shout that our **lives** matter.”

Next week (Feb. 5 through Feb. 9) Seattle teachers’ union [Social Equity Educators \(SEE\)](#) will participate in the first-ever “**Black Lives** Matter at School,” a “national week of **action for racial justice**” per the SEE press

action for racial justice, per the [ELL press release](#) announcing the event. Cities including Los Angeles, Portland, Chicago and Washington, D.C., will also be participating.

The week has been unanimously endorsed by the Repetitive Assembly of the [Seattle Education Association](#) (SEA, the teachers union of Seattle). Also in support: The [Seattle Peoples Party](#), the [Seattle/King Count NAACP](#), [Black Lives Matter](#) (BLM) co-founder [Opal Tometi](#) and [Seattle Seahawk Michael Bennett](#).

Teacher participation is voluntary, with each teacher choosing activities suited to their class that fit the day's theme including restorative justice, empathy and collective value. Additional details from SEE can be found [here](#).

Why Seattle?

Not convinced that our liberal-leaning city has a race problem in our schools? Consider this:

The gap between white and [Black](#) students in

Seattle's schools is one of the biggest in the country, Seattle Public Schools' advanced learning program is overwhelmingly white and many teachers struggle to find support for measures to close the education gap.

It's not just numbers, either. Less than two years ago, an event at John Muir Elementary School designed to counter stereotypes of **Black** men was derailed by threats of violence. In response, more than 2,000 Seattle teachers wore **Black Lives** Matter shirts to school on Oct. 19, 2016, momentum that helped lead to the addition of ethnic studies classes in Seattle-area public schools.

“**Black Lives** Matter at School” grew from that Oct. 2016 event. This year, educators across the country are calling for three major changes in the nation's schools: 1) end zero tolerance and implement restorative justice; 2) hire more **Black** teachers; and 3) mandate **Black** history/ethnic studies in grades K through 12.

SEE is also calling for full funding of schools

and [de-tracking the curriculum](#) to combat racial segregation.

“The opportunity gap between [Black](#) students and white students in Seattle Public Schools is growing and we are done waiting for change. We demand equity,” said Seattle/King County NAACP education chair Rita Green. “We will be in the struggle for [Black](#) [lives](#) to matter at school until that basic fact is recognized by every single school.”

How can you participate?

All families are invited to wear BLM shirts throughout the week (especially on Monday and Friday, per the SEE press release). For those who would like to purchase a shirt, consider supporting a [Black](#)-owned business through such resources as [Backing \[Black\]\(#\) Business](#).

There will also be a rally on Friday, Feb. 9, from 6 to 8 p.m. at [Cleveland High School](#)

6 to 8 p.m. at [Cleveland High School](#).

Community members will share their vision for equitable schools and artists will perform throughout the evening.

Be prepared for your kids to come home with questions. It's okay not to have all the answers but it's important to continue the dialogue at home.

“When people choose not to talk about race or see race, they are contributing to racism and unaccountability that devalues **Black** students,” says North Seattle mom Patterson. “**Black Lives Matter**’ is not just a slogan; it’s a civil rights movement. Teaching it at school is teaching current events.”

Resources to keep the conversation going

[Teaching Tolerance](#) — a project of the Southern Poverty Law Center that offers classroom resources

[When Racism Shows Up on the Family Camping Trip](#) — a Seattle mom speaks with Marquita Prinzing of Families of Color Seattle (FOCS)

[When Racism Shows Up on the Family Camping Trip — Part 2](#) — includes resources from FOCS

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