

# SCHOOL UNION 76

BROOKLIN – DEER ISLE-STONINGTON CSD – SEDGWICK

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Office of the Superintendent

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*“Public Schools not only serve the public, they make the public.”*

## Superintendent’s Memo

To: SU 76 Parents, Guardians & Staff  
From: Christian M. Elkington  
Re: Thoughts and next steps on Civil Unrest  
Date: 6-1-2020

I like many of you have watched over the last week and with greater focus, this past weekend, multiple events which have both saddened and sickened me many times over. Three deaths of two black men and one black woman appears to have, with COVID 19 and skyrocketing unemployment, finally boiled over for many in our country. As we have seen this weekend, this despair and grief, which is especially true for the poorest Americans and Americans of color, has led to protests. Unfortunately for the vast majority of people who were trying to protest peacefully, some agitators and fringe groups decided to take advantage of the protests and turn them into riots, while still others took advantage and looted in several places across our country. Peaceful protest is a core belief of our country, but when it turns violent law enforcement must intervene as they have and are.

I have said to many and to myself hundreds of times over my career in schools "I/we don't know what it is like to live in their shoes (students or families), so don't assume you really know why..." I can't assume what it is like to live in someone else's shoes, especially a black man's. I also can't imagine what it must be like to worry about what might happen to you or your child on the streets of our country. I have a son who likes to go for runs just like Ahmaud Arberry did and can't imagine worrying about if he could get shot while on a run. I have no idea what it means to be living through the disrespect people of color feel they receive, the lack of trust they feel from authorities, the prejudice which plagues them and the despair and hopelessness many people of color live through every day in our country. I am at a loss not for me, but for those of color, when it comes to what needs to happen for them to be treated like me.

I am sharing these thoughts with you, our parents, communities and staff because you are the teachers, you have the platform, you have the audience and you will help decide what our children will learn from these events. Your actions and words will help model what our children will think and do next, when it comes to their thoughts, beliefs and actions towards people of color.

Percentage-wise, Maine is the whitest state in the United States and so our children rarely get to mingle, play with, grow up with, become friends with or learn from children

and families of color. Since our schools only have a handful of children of color, what many of our children learn about people of color comes mostly from us and, unfortunately, TV and the internet and not through their interactions with people of color. Because of this what we say and do will be most important if we as a community, state and nation are ever going to turn the tide on the prejudice, disrespect and hopelessness that Americans of color feel and experience each and every day.

As many of you have experienced these last three + months, a state of helplessness is one of the worst feelings someone can have. This is especially true when it is in reference to wanting to help someone you know or have concern for. What I have seen during these difficult months in our communities, is people working together, helping out their neighbors and supporting the common good. In this national hour of need the common good is for each one of us to work towards mutual respect, decency, care and concern for our fellow man, woman and child. It is my hope that as we have these last three + months, that we also see people around our nation as our neighbors and fellow Americans and that we don't turn to our children, Twitter or Facebook to teach and/or model hate, disrespect or prejudice. Together we will keep HOPE alive within each of our children and within children of color by caring words, actions and what we say and do!

Because we live in Maine, far away from much of the racial difficulties our country faces we cannot become desensitized to these events. As your children's number one teacher you have a responsibility to teach them the importance of dignity, respect and *"that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness."*

Thanks for listening!