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Being More Racially Conscious

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While skimming one of my education journals recently, a piece titled *Secessions Exacerbate Segregation* caught my eye. The article described how there has been a dramatic increase across the country where smaller affluent, predominantly white communities petition to split off from larger school systems to form districts of their own. Supporters of these new districts say they were motivated to break away from the larger districts because they wanted more local control. Unfortunately, this trend to create smaller school districts from larger systems has increased racial segregation.

The historic hard-earned gains on diversity and inclusivity being a common public good are quickly being dismantled by legal avenues and loopholes. There seems to be this pervasive pressure to separate, to segregate and be more exclusive.

I'm proud that all 42 school districts in DuPage County value the diversity, acceptance and celebration of all races and ethnic backgrounds. In Glenbard District 87, our staff has been on a three-year journey called *Courageous Conversations*. Through discussion, reflection and enacting action, we are striving to be more racially conscious, culturally focused and welcoming. Some of the key topic areas we are unpacking regarding adult conversations include:

- Recognizing that many of us live, grow, worship, play and work in environments that are racially segregated and that this can give us slanted bias as we interact with others with more diverse backgrounds than ours.
- Recognizing that racism may occur even when an issue or incident was unintentional. The impact of seemingly innocent cross-cultural misunderstandings and disconnects can result in an individual being harmed or hurt.
- Remembering that being comfortable being uncomfortable is critical in my interactions as I listen, learn and grow from hearing others' perspectives and backgrounds.
- Learning to stay engaged and expect and accept non-closure as I listen, share and grow as I have conversations with others. We are each processing and working through our beliefs, feelings, thoughts and actions as we grow and develop in being more racially conscious.

In recent years, our civic and political landscape seems more divisive and polarized. The good news is that your local public schools remain steadfast in their efforts to model and teach unity, understanding and acceptance. We are learning and growing, through thoughtful conversations, to be more racially conscious and committed to equity and inclusion. We are focused on creating learning environments that are safe, inclusive and welcoming for each other and especially for our students.