

Maryland County Passes a Black Lives Matter Week of Action for All Its Schools

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A young girl raises her fist along with others after Baltimore authorities released a report on the death of Freddie Gray on May 1, 2015, in Baltimore. (Win McNamee/Getty Images)

The Prince George’s County school board voted unanimously on Friday to pass a resolution (pdf) called the “Black Lives Matter Week of Action in Schools” so that the 128,000 students in the second-largest school district in Maryland will learn about and discuss the Black Lives Matter movement starting Monday.

Fox 5 DC reports that the Black Lives Matter Week of Action in Schools differs from, but is inspired by, the Black Lives Matter network started by three black women in 2014.

The Week of Action is a national movement started by teachers, parents and administrators and, according to Teaching for Change, will include instruction about “structural racism, intersectional Black identities, and Black history.” The organization offers resources for teachers at every grade level.

Prince George’s County Public Schools—a school system that is nearly 70 percent black—was one of the first school systems in Maryland to pass this type of resolution. It reads:

RESOLUTION REGARDING BLACK LIVES MATTER AT SCHOOL

WHEREAS, a national movement has arisen to assert that Black Lives Matter;

WHEREAS, this movement has raised awareness about injustices that exist at the intersections of race, class, and gender; including mass incarceration, police brutality, poverty, unaffordable housing, income disparity, homophobia, unjust immigration policies, gender inequality, and poor access to healthcare;

WHEREAS, in support of a national movement of teachers, parents, scholars and administrators who have come together to proclaim a week of action, affirmation, and solidarity, to be called “Black Lives Matter Week of Action in Schools”;

WHEREAS, the thirteen guiding principles of the Black Lives Matter movement highlighted during this week of action are a means of challenging the insidious legacy of institutionalized racism and oppression that has plagued the United States since its founding;

WHEREAS, the purpose of the week will be to spark an ongoing movement of critical reflection and honest conversations in school communities for people of all ages to engage with critical issues of social justice;

WHEREAS, schools should be places for the practice of equity, for the building of understanding, and for the active engagement of all in creating pathways to freedom and justice for all people; and,

WHEREAS, the Maryland State Educators Association (MSEA) and the Prince George’s County Educators Association have voted to support Black Lives Matter at School week; NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT, the Prince George’s County Board of Education endorses and encourages teachers and students to participate in the Black Lives Matter Week of Action in Schools to be held on February 5-10, 2018.

School board members told Fox 5 that it will be left up to teachers’ discretion as to what to implement during the week, as well as whether lessons will be during instructional time or before or after school.

“I don’t believe it is political,” said Amanyia Paige, the student member of the school board, to Fox 5. “I believe it is a movement to encourage minorities and African-American students to be proud of who they are and to embrace who they are because we live it every day. I think that it is important to understand our culture and understand where we are coming from in order to be productive citizens.”

Prince George’s County is about two-thirds African American and was once the most prosperous black area of the country before the housing crisis decimated much of its wealth.

Despite many of the residents’ economic trajectory, the county has long had a well-documented history of police brutality, including the very highly publicized death of Prince Jones, a 25-year-old friend of writer Ta-Nehisi Coates, who wrote about Jones’ death in his

seminal work *Between the World and Me*.

Coates spoke about Jones in his 2015 National Book Award acceptance speech. “[W]hen Prince Jones died [in 2000], there were no cameras. There was nobody else looking. The officer that killed him was not prosecuted. ... He was sent back out into the streets to work, as though nothing happened,” Coates said. “As though Prince Jones’s life did not matter at all.”

But to some educators, teachers, parents and students, black lives do matter.