# The Spence Schools Response to BlackatSpenceSpeaks

## Call to Action

I. Declare an unequivocal condemnation of police violence and the institutions that underlie racism in our country, to the entire Spence community. This means explicitly denouncing the racist comments made by our president and his enablers.

   A. Incorporate an informational section on the Spence website detailing specific efforts the school is taking to support members of color in the community. This can be done through posting donation links and encouraging community members to actively use their resources as a substantial form of aid.

II. Release a list of resources for self-education including but not limited to: a list of informative links, movies, podcasts, books by Black authors, organizations, and other resources that will assist in navigating conversations with family, friends, and peers.

   A. List here: Resources for Self Education

III. Facilitate frequent conversations involving students, alums, faculty, administrators, and staff to encourage dialogue about social reform and share ideas about possible strategies.

   A. Assign a book in common or a film during Gathering for the start of Black History Month, and host conversations surrounding the book or film as a way to move the responsibility of these conversations off the shoulders of Black students.

   B. These conversations should not only take place in separated racial affinity groups, but there needs to be multiple conversations by grade, sports team, extracurricular, etc., that are inherently uncomfortable in order for there to be any change. Separating students makes for less productive conversations, as really confronting these issues must be done together.

## Spence Response

The Head of School and Board Chair published a letter on June 14 noting: *Spence unequivocally condemns systemic racism and the violence against and murder of Black people, often by the very people charged to protect them. We stand in solidarity against racism and will continue to work against its horrific impact both within and beyond the Red Doors.*

- Spence website updated to ensure important equity information highlighted on homepage and to direct attention to the Equity page
- Equity page redesigned to provide regular, clear and transparent updates on ongoing work on professional development, programming, resources and new initiatives
- Website includes a section on the Anti-Racism Task Force charge, its membership and updates of their work

- Resource list developed by @BlackSpenceSpeaks shared in community-wide communications by the Director of Institutional Equity in June 2020. Resources also distributed to faculty and staff.

- Head of School and Director of Institutional Equity hosted 17 listening sessions on race with Spence alumnae and four similar sessions for Upper School current students.

- The Upper School leadership team, in collaboration with the Director of Institutional Equity and the newly appointed Dean of Parent and Student Inclusion and Belonging, will work with students to design and schedule conversations on race in the school community. This year’s focus is on coalition building and dialogue.

- The student leadership of the Upper School Affinity and Identity groups will meet regularly to share experiences and exchange ideas to foster belonging inside and outside the affinity space.

- The Middle School “We Are Spence” Diversity Alliance, a coalition of Affinity and Identity groups, established to focus on belonging, gather the insights, efforts, and actions of the identity and affinity groups and organize them around shifting the entire Middle School community.
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| III. Facilitate frequent conversations involving students, cont. | • Each division creates ongoing opportunities in all-school faculty meetings to demonstrate priorities for anti-racist teaching and learning (see below).  
• Ibram X. Kendi’s *How to be an AntiRacist*, selected as a community read to further foster conversations about race at Spence. All faculty and staff and US Students, as well the Alum Leadership Board, received copies and the School extended an invitation to the entire community. The Director of Institutional Equity has hosted alum book discussions, and more discussions for students, faculty, staff and parents are planned this fall.  
• Facilitation training for Grades 9 and 10 (and in the future for Grades 11 and 12) will be held through a partnership with Hockaday School and the civic engagement organization CloseUp in a series of workshops called, Empowering Female Voices.  
• Newly created Parents’ Association position, Vice-President for Community, will work with the Dean of Parent and Student Inclusion and Belonging and the Director of Institutional Equity to create family partnership for student belonging.  
• Affinity groups for Black and Latinx parents and guardians started in 2020-2021. |
| IV. Continue the installation of student and faculty made projects over the wallpaper in the seventh floor lecture hall, which displays and glorifies the trans-Atlantic slave trade and abuse of Indigenous peoples.  
A. This includes events that celebrate BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) cultures hosted by students and faculty. | • The Board of Trustees voted unanimously to remove the wallpaper, and the removal already completed. [Link here to the community-wide announcement](#). |
| V. Redesign and unify the Global and US History curriculums, ensuring that every student receives an intersectional education, incorporating Black history in the diaspora and the evolution of racism in America.  
A. Require the history department to rearrange the syllabi to weave black history within existing units, underscoring the prominence of blackness in various time periods. | • New Upper School History scope and sequence, replacing junior-year electives, to include a new three-year US and Global History curriculum. Upper School history curriculum now includes:  
• Deeper examination of the Black Diaspora, colonialism, and the history of race, power, and identity globally  
• History skills include more in-depth coverage of core equity competencies, from listening to facilitation to speaking truth in groups to seeking multiple perspectives  
• Assessment of all Upper School students on their understanding of systemic racism and on their grasp of dynamics of power and privilege |
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| **V. Redesign and unify the Global and US History curriculums, cont.** | • Academic divisions’ ongoing curriculum review will continue the new charge from the Head of School to consider the following questions: How does our curriculum support our students to graduate from Spence knowing about systemic racism, inequality and historical oppression and equipped with skills to dismantle it? How does it also give all of our students adequate understanding to think about the richness and beauty of different experiences?  
  - All disciplines started examining what teaching with an anti-racist lens means for them at grade-level in Middle School  
  - Increased attention to interpersonal skill-building in Middle School through support from the Morningside Center for Social Responsibility  
  - Equity literacy strengthened in Lower School:  
    - Pollyanna, a comprehensive Racial Literacy curriculum, selected to be implemented K-4  
    - Two new teacher-leaders—Equity Curriculum Coordinator and Instructional—appointed to the Lower School Leadership Team and charged with managing the professional development of faculty. |
| **VI. Create specific and transparent hiring goals to curate a faculty that accurately represents the demographics of the city the school is in.** | • Following a multi-year review, a thorough overhaul of hiring practices, from outreach to retention, was completed in June 2020, and we have added steps for continual evaluation of these practices.  
  • The School holds ongoing implicit bias training for all hiring agents with The Perception Institute. Speakers for cultural competency have included Derald Wing Sue and Howard Stevenson.  
  • Onboarding, stay interviews, as well as exit interviews, are all conducted regularly through the first year of “onboarding” to track morale and strengthen retention among our faculty of color.  
  • Senior Administrative team develops and reviews annual hiring goals. |
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| VII. Take steps to alleviate the particular burden on Black faculty and address the high turnover rate Spence has experienced with these professionals. | • Accountability measures being implemented to support the racial literacy and professional capacity of all employees, as part of the design for PoC faculty and staff retention, with guidance provided by teacher representatives in each division and the Director of Teaching and Learning.  
• Professional Development focused on raising community competency (for retention) includes: sessions with PEG on Racial Equity Purpose and anti-Blackness; cultural competency and centering student belonging with curriculum questions with Ronald Taylor; Racial Trauma (with Kenneth Hardy).  
• Facilitated learning experiences for the spring faculty meetings structured to affirm and amplify the voices of racially marginalized groups, counter deficit thinking, support student academic growth and development, enhance self-awareness, promote social responsibility, and disrupt dehumanization. |
| VIII. Introduce a yearly report on strides in social justice education and the effects of the requests herein. | • The Board of Trustees is conducting a nationwide search for an organization that will partner with the Board in producing an annual culture climate audit and published report. |
| IX. Implement an anonymous feedback system for each class so students feel comfortable reporting an incident without jeopardizing their relationship with the faculty member.  
A. Suggested to be added in LMS, the website used by students for class resources. A student submits a form which is presented to the teacher anonymously.  
B. For accountability purposes, the teacher must report back in LMS once they believe the incident has been properly addressed  
C. After an incident has been marked as “addressed” by a teacher, a follow-up email can be sent back to the student to ensure full protection and accountability for the student | • The School just added “acts of bias” protocols to each of the divisional handbooks for reporting acts of bias.  
• All have age-appropriate, clear steps for thorough action, and community member accountability.  
• Process centralizes repair of any harm done, and attention to learning.  
• Design assures alignment with Community Standards, Equity Board Statement and school mission. |
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<td><strong>X.</strong> Acknowledge the shortcomings of Spence when it comes to a diverse curriculum and protecting its students of color from experiencing racism within the Red Doors. We cannot stay in the past; but in order to move forward we must acknowledge the mistakes made, and the costs associated with those mistakes to the Spence community of color.</td>
<td>• Acknowledging the labor of many Black teachers historically who have given extra support to students of color work without extra pay (recognizing that it is often both a joy and a burden of time), the School is hiring new leadership positions to assure institutional structures and resources are dedicated to supporting students of color, so our faculty and staff of color are not the ones carrying that weight:</td>
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<td><strong>A.</strong> This includes acknowledging the burden placed on the brave faculty who have risked their jobs to stand up for us, and to advocate for us both publicly and behind closed doors. They deserve recognition for being our support system, on top of dealing with biases apparent within the faculty.</td>
<td>• Dean of Parent and Student Inclusion and Belonging, to focus on supporting affinity group leaders and designing cross-divisional empowerment structures in partnership with parent and guardian work.</td>
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<td><strong>B.</strong> This includes acknowledging the racism present against the staff by members of the student body and faculty. These include, but are not limited to, the people who work in our kitchen staff, maintenance staff and the security team.</td>
<td>• A special project manager position for the Office of Institutional Equity is being designed to develop empowerment and mentoring programming.</td>
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<td>• The Director of Institutional Equity and the Director of Finance and Operations will work with the management teams of Facilities, Campus Safety, Tech Department, the Kitchen, and Events and Administrative leadership to assure that all Spence Community Standards apply to all.</td>
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<td>• Professional development for staff and support for ongoing equity learning, mentoring, and support are all designed with individual managers.</td>
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<td>• Community check-ins at times of national crisis/to discuss issues of racial justice made available to all employees equally</td>
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