

What Educators Must Know

Dr. Muhammad Khalifa

UNDERSTANDING AND CONFRONTING MUSLIM STUDENT MARGINALIZATION

- ❖ Recognize that Islamophobia is one of the most widespread, rapidly-growing, and tolerated types of oppression in school and society today.
- ❖ Craft anti-oppression policies that protect the rights of Muslim students.
- ❖ Identify discourses and practices of Christian privilege and White privilege.
 - Know that *Christian Privilege* is not only having major Christian holidays off, Sundays off, and Christian trappings in school;
 - Rather, *Christian Privilege* can encompass much more complex issues such as: community vs. individual epistemologies, approaches to learning, purpose of education, and even sources of and what counts as knowledge.
- ❖ Institutionalize practices in your school that constantly.
- ❖ Recognize that Islamophobia can be connected to Muslims (people) or Islam (beliefs):
 - *Muslims* are seen as subhuman, irrational, violent, or backward;
 - *Islamic beliefs* are seen as antiquated (fossilized), illogical, incompatible with non-Muslim beliefs, or secular practices.
- ❖ Know that because of wide-spread anti-Muslim bigotry, Muslims students may mask or hide their Muslim identities.
- ❖ Know that anti-Muslim bias is varied and looks different when combined with other aspects of Muslim student identity such as gender, race, class, ethnicity, immigrant status or national origin, and language-learner status, among other traits.
- ❖ Discuss with your staff how you have been complicit—directly or indirectly—in Islamophobic practices.

EMPOWERING MUSLIM STUDENT IDENTITIES

- ❖ Institutionalize ways of gauging or measuring Muslim student belongingness and anti-Muslim bigotry in your school; Complete annual equity audits.
- ❖ Similar to race work that some schools do, Have Muslim student speak-outs, or other in-school spaces where they can express their identities, and speak about experiences of Muslim life.
- ❖ Recognize that Islam is not a religion in the sense that Western Europeans separated faith from other aspects of life; It is a way of life.
 - Accommodate aspect of Muslim life in school, including daily prayer spaces, prayer washing (ablution) spaces, and Friday prayer spaces, or fasting.
- ❖ Infuse curriculum and school activities with intellectual traditions that originate in the Muslim World;
 - Acknowledge the origin of knowledge that came from the Muslim World.

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- Celebrate contemporary Muslim accomplishments and personalities, such as Kunta Kente, Muhammad Ali, Keith Ellison, Yusuf Lateef, John Coltrane, Malcolm X, Mahershala Ali, etc.
- ❖ Protect Muslim female dress
- ❖ Celebrate Muslim holidays as much as Christian and Jewish holidays
- ❖ Resist discourse that exoticizes Muslim identity, and makes it completely foreign.
 - The largest group of Muslims in this country are American converts to Islam: African American, Latin@, and White American Muslims.
- ❖ Initiate *anti-Muslim bigotry* campaigns in school; partner with community.

ENGAGING MUSLIM COMMUNITIES

- ❖ Invite local Muslim leaders and organizations into conversations about schooling, students, and educational reform.
- ❖ Use community-based knowledge from the Muslim community to enrich your understanding of Islam.
- ❖ Find ways to bring Muslim communities into school spaces.
- ❖ Resist CVE efforts that: a.) criminalize or entrap Muslim youth, or b.) do not have a culturally responsive community reentry component in the program, c.) are non-critical of colonizing or imperialist involvement of Muslim peoples and/or lands.
- ❖ Start a community engagement student group that focuses on issues important to the Muslim community.
- ❖ The Muslim community is very diverse and some have louder voices and more established presences; be sure to engage all of the components to the Muslim community, and not to ignore smaller/newer populations within the Muslim community.

EMBRACING MUSLIM ADVOCACY

- ❖ Support causes connected to Muslim community.
- ❖ Invite Muslim students to allyship with other minoritized communities engaged in social justice and equity work.
- ❖ Discover what causes are important for your local Muslim community (for example: job opportunity, racialized police brutality, fighting against terrorism, resisting a national “Muslim ban,” or drug abuse) and join with the community in advocating for positive change.
- ❖ Use school resources—staff, school space, student activities, and even financial resources—to advocate for causes important Muslim student inclusion and belongingness.

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Dr. Muhammad Khalifa is an associate professor in the Department of Organizational Leadership, Policy, and Development at the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities. His research examines how urban school leaders enact culturally responsive leadership practices in school and community. He has led equity audits in U.S. schools as a way to reduce achievement and discipline gaps, and is the first to develop and use online Equity Audits. In this, he has helped school districts select appropriate and responsive reforms that counter inequitable practices in school (www.schoolequityproject.com).

He is the author of the forthcoming book, *Leading with Community: Culturally Responsive School Leadership for Minoritized Youth* (Harvard Education Press). He is also coeditor of three other books: *The School to Prison Pipeline: The Role of Culture and Discipline in School* (Emerald Group Publishing), *Handbook on Urban Educational Leadership* (Rowan & Littlefield), and *Becoming Critical: The Emergence of Social Justice Scholars* (SUNY Press). And he has published in many of the top education journals, *Review of Educational Research*, *Teachers College Record*, *Urban Education*, *Race Ethnicity and Education*, and, *Educational Administration Quarterly*, to name a few.