

Racism is like a dark gray cloud that hangs over our world, covering the sun with inequality and injustice. Imagine a canvas tainted with prejudice, where some colors are benefited through the exclusion of others. It is a toxic ideology designed to judge people based on their features and skin complexion, allowing stereotypes and discrimination to continue. Racism is a divider of our people and a divider of our joy. Its taintedness prevents the beautiful canvas of humanity from shining through.

Racism is like spilled coffee on paper, or like the sticker you forgot to take off your clothes before washing them. It is so embedded in our society, that it will take everyone to collectively help out in order to get to that canvas of equality, unity, and inclusion. In Vermont schools there is a lack of action. People will say this reality is “horrible” and “upsetting” but that is as far as they go to show they care.

We’ve created a culture of silence, and it is a direct result from the lack of action, support, and education. People of color fall victim to harm too often but we can’t talk about the harm that has been done because we are told that “a classroom is not the place for this type of discussion” and our pain is “too political”. Students of color are tired of having a zipper to shut my mouth but not theirs because hearing harm be done is more tolerable and makes Vermont schools more comfortable than hearing the truth.

The truth cannot be ignored. Students of color are drowning in a sea filled with slurs, stereotypes, biases, and microaggressions. We gasp and wait for educators, administrators, and policy makers to care and help us. The helicopter might be in the sky but there is no ladder being put down to save us. You say you’re here to help, but actions speak louder than words. Where is the action?

We live in a state where racial diversity is merely a concept; where the population is over 90% white. We live in a state where oppression is real and not just a thing of the past like everyone says it is. We live in a state where bodies of color, simply existing, are a political statement. Words and assumptions imprinted on our skin that cannot be erased like footprints in now-dry pavement.

Yet hope remains. We can create change, but it has to be us. Some of us have been and are still currently fighting for a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive education, but it needs to be all of us. Angela Davis once said, “I am no longer accepting the things I cannot change. I am changing the things I cannot accept.” So here we are, activating towards change.

Folks of color, let this drive you to speak up and share your experiences no matter how loud or quiet your voice is. White folks, allow yourself to use this opportunity to commit to doing the work of being an anti-racist. Educators and administrators, put the ladder down and help us. Nelson Mandela said it best, “We can change the world and make it a better place. It is in our hands to make a difference.” With this, we encourage you to join us in the “Let Me Be Great” Campaign and make that difference.

This campaign is a collaboration between the Vermont Student Anti-Racism Network, the Rutland NAACP, Building Fearless Futures, and the Vermont Racial Justice Alliance, as well as multiple students, equity directors, and school staff. This campaign came about because VSARN and the NAACP sent out a survey last school year asking about racism in schools; topics such as diversity in curriculum, racial slurs, and DEI coordinators. We got alarming results.

Through this campaign, we are touring Vermont schools and presenting the survey results to school boards, administration, and staff - as well as discussing (from the student perspective!) what can be done to foster a more inclusive environment. Whether you want to be more involved in building the campaign, or you just want to receive resources and PD, we would love you to join! Sign up for any aspect of the campaign here: <https://forms.gle/8UX2mFNoc7fvwpEs7>

We are planning to have a conference in Vermont on Wednesday, November 8th. Location and time is still TBD!

We hope you will be part of our collective movement!