

To the Members and Friends of NJTESOL/NJBE

The past few years have been a time of constant change for the teachers of multilingual learners, their students, families, and higher education professionals who work in so many different capacities with teachers and students. It has been a time of change for NJTESOL/NJBE as well. NJTESOL/NJBE has been transitioning from a volunteer to an employee lead organization and in doing so has experienced mistakes in decision making which lead to events that caused racial harm and inter-organization conflict.

Members of the Executive Board sought out assistance from groups focused on organizational Restorative Justice and eventually contracted with the [Center for Equity Education](#). The officers of NJTESOL/NJBE and other individuals met with Colleen Schoenfeld and members of CFEE over several months to identify appropriate ways to address the issues and provide Restorative Justice for the events that took place. All identified participants, including those who resigned from the Countering Anti-Black Racism Committee, were invited to participate in this process, and several chose not to contribute at their choice. Officers of the Executive Board implemented these two goals to address what happened and prevent it in the future.

**Goal # 1: By our next summer retreat, NJTESOL/NJBE will have identified areas of improvement in the transition towards a contractor/ employee run organization to support the continuous growth and needs of our members. Dr. Emma Powell will facilitate this process.**

**Goal # 2: Throughout the 2022-2023 academic year, NJTESOL/NJBE will participate in a restorative practice process facilitated by Center for Equity Education to repair and improve the professional relationship among the officers, members of the board, and contractor/employees, committee members, and presenters to support the continuous growth and needs of our members.**

To achieve these goals Ms. Schoenfeld and Dr. Powell have met with members of the Executive Board and its officers several times to identify, suggest, and clarify new paths to avoid causing racial harm and inter-organizational conflict again.

The Center for Equity Education did identify areas of racial harm that happened surrounding last year's conference and are listed below which NJTESOL/NJBE regrets and will actively work to avoid having others occur in the future. We sincerely apologize to all who experienced harm.

CFEE identified several areas of concern with the events leading up to, during, and in response to the events surrounding the June 2022 conference. These concerns are listed and explained as follows:

1. First, it should be noted that multiple members of leadership as well as members of the organization have expressed verbally and in writing, the sense that Anti-Black and Anti-Racism work is not a part of or in alignment with the organization's mission. That the Keynote speakers recommended by the CABR (Countering Anti-Black Racism) subcommittee were not in alignment with the organization's mission or the topic areas of the conference.

*CFEE provides the following observation: it is difficult to parse out and separate the work of NJTESOL/NJBE of providing support to and services related to English as a Second Language, considering NJ student demographics, NJ ESL instructors demographics, without considering race, national origin, ethnicity, and socio-economic status as integral to their mission and operations. The description NJTESOL/NJBE themselves provided in describing Keynote speakers was that their work was in alignment with the work being done by NJTESOL/NJBE and even more so in light of the statement and stance released by the organization on their solidarity with Anti-Black racism.*

2. Confusion within the internal structural and operational procedures led to a lack of contracts provided to speakers and confusion surrounding in-person vs virtual and speaker fees.

*CFEE also offered the following observations and considerations.*

- a. *Women, and particularly Black women, historically and to this day have been paid less than their peers. While it may not have been intentional on the part of the organization to have disparate pay among the presenters initially, there was a disparity, that when considered in wider societal and historical contexts, is problematic.*
  - b. *The lack of contracts and detailed information and coordination was perceived, by the CABR as a lack of respect and professional courtesy provided to a Black woman presenter. While it may not have been an intentional act, the impact was a perception that despite its professed commitment to addressing and standing in solidarity with Anti-Black racism, the organization had engaged in racial harm.*
  - c. *Note, when considering whether a behavior, communication, or act is discriminatory or harassing, based on race or another protected status/class, **it is the impact that is evaluated, regardless of the intent of the person alleged to have engaged in the harm.***
3. CFEE identified that when a CABR (Countering Anti-Black Racism) subcommittee member was interested in speaking to leadership and a “broader” audience to go over the concerns held, internal communications were not responsive and questioned whether it was this member's role to engage in these conversations.  
*CFEE provides the context that in many instances and historically, when issues of racism or harm are raised regarding a marginalized group, to the majority group, one reaction is to dismiss the raiser of the concern. Questioning and raising the problem of how and why this committee member wanted to engage in a dialogue to raise concerns and whether it was their role to do so, while not explicit, is an indicator of this tendency.*
  4. CFEE identified a correspondence that described the raising of concerns by a committee as an “attack.” The author of this correspondence stated that these “attacks,” hurt members of the Executive Board “deeply,” and that they are “nice,” people and described the parties raising concerns as “aggressors.”  
*CFEE notes that much work and documentation show how white supremacy and oppressive systems are perpetuated and upheld. One way is by labeling the party who is*

*calling attention to a concern or problem, as the problem itself. Defensiveness is often demonstrated when a concern of racism is raised, especially if the party defending itself sees itself as anti-racist or not racist. Rather than hear or address the concerns, a human tendency is to withdraw into a defensive posture and shift blame to the party identifying a problem. They are also used to shift attention away from the harmed party or those raising concerns to the feelings of those being alleged to have engaged in the harm. It is beyond the capability of this document to provide a complete history and demonstrate the full range of ways this is enacted, but this correspondence among NJTESOL/NJBE, while not again a finding or statement of fact, appears to be an illustration of this type of reaction.*

5. CFEE also notes and observes a hesitancy of leadership and membership to admit any harm or fault, especially related to race, for any events leading up to, during, or following/responding to the June 2022 conference.

*While it is a crucial step to identify a conflict, seek ways to resolve it, and make changes to prevent reoccurrence, there must be first a reflection on and admission of any identified harms enacted. There must also be a long-term and dedicated commitment to learning what the impacts were and a long-term and continued commitment to continued learning and changing to prevent reoccurrence. Anti-Racism and Anti-Black racism work is a continuous process and must be an intentional and core part of an organization committed to this work.*

In order to prevent a recurrence of racial or any other harm, NJTESOL/NJBE will be acting on the recommendations of the Center for Equity Education, which include:

- Determining if this organization is committed to Anti-Black racism as a core value integrated into the organization's mission
- Engaging in extensive and ongoing training with leadership, specifically Executive Board leadership, on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) and racial bias.
- Issuing a public statement to all members on the Executive Board's direction and guidance moving forward.
- Creating and implementing policies directly related to discrimination, harassment, diversity, equity, inclusion, and anti-racism, and training the membership annually on these policies, especially staff and leadership positions.

NJTESOL/NJBE hopes that the public recognition of institutional and racially systemic errors that occurred in relation to the 2022 Spring Conference and the measures we have taken to ensure that these types of mistakes do not happen again, encourages those who experienced harm and indicates that we take their feelings and concerns seriously. CFEE concluded its report in this way:

*Racism, structural oppression, and inequity were not created and implemented in a limited or short timeframe and cannot be addressed in a short time frame. They must be addressed by commitment and continuous active and deliberate work and training to address the harms of the past and prevent future harms.*

*NJTESOL/NJBE is in an excellent and unique position and has the reach and influence to create meaningful and impactful change. The students served by this organization's membership will benefit, as will the members themselves, the organization, and the communities which they and this organization serve.*

The Executive Board agrees with this assessment and looks forward to the opportunity to educate ourselves and offer opportunities for learning to our membership in order to improve our understanding of all types of discrimination related to harassment, diversity, equity, inclusion, and anti-racism.