

May 20, 2022

Dear President & Dr. Biden,

My name is Selena Borek, I teach 5th grade bilingual education in the City of Buffalo at Frank A. Sedita Academy (School 30). My students were traumatized from the racially motivated mass shooting that took place here on May 14th. Several of my students live in that neighborhood, visited the Tops grocery store earlier that day, and some even knew community members who died or were injured in the event. Our student community was in shock that following Monday, and continues to be in the aftermath of this traumatic event.

As a city teacher, I also felt the trauma of this event. I checked the news daily for names and identities to see if any of my students or their families were killed. I struggled through tears and confusion on Monday as I spoke about the incident with my class. They looked at me with such pain and concern. I had no real answers for them, other than that I loved them and cared for them deeply, but I cannot protect them from racism in their communities.

I felt the heavy weight of white supremacy in this country while I tried to tell my students of color that they were safe, loved, and cared for when they experienced a tragedy in direct opposition to those words of affirmation and comfort. I felt powerless, as did they.

However, I chose to empower my students to fight racism. We opted to write letters to you about ways to confront racism, support our communities of color, and improve the lives of those facing discrimination. The conversations about racism, equality, and human rights while we brainstormed our letters proved to be the best lesson of my life. My students eagerly wrote independently to you about ways to change our community for the better. They even asked to keep writing and skip other subjects to finish their writing (which doesn't often happen in 5th grade!). They came up with ideas, solutions, and suggestions that the most senior government leaders should listen to and take seriously.

Thank you for your service to this country, your job is not easy. Thank you for representing my hometown of Scranton, PA (grew up there my whole life!). Please consider responding to my students if you can do so, or even sending a photo of you reading them. They so desperately want to address racism in their communities, and this would be such a "win" for them! They need inspiration that the fight against racism and violent extremism is not moot, but rather a marathon that we can accomplish in our lifetimes.

Sincerely,

Selena Borek