

I send this letter home to the families of my students before beginning my URC implementation. I send it for two reasons: to open a dialogue with parents so that there were no surprises as we begin this unconventional unit, and to invite the recipients to do their own learning so the conversation could continue at home.

The details below may not apply in your situation but I share it here in case you find it useful. Please feel free to copy and edit as you see fit.

In my case, the results are wonderful year after year: many parents appreciated being informed and none have ever expressed concern, and the parent evening lesson has felt successful and fun.

Dear Parents and Guardians,

3/5/18

In a few days, we're beginning a new unit in *Senior Physics* in which some challenging topics are likely to come up. As I said at Back to School Night, I believe that challenge is an important part of growth – so in some ways this will be business as usual – but since challenges are a little different than before, I wanted to take a minute to explain.

In this unit, which I've included in class since 2006, we compare the demographics of professional physicists to that of the American population. Perhaps it won't surprise you to learn that they're not the same: some groups are overrepresented among physicists, and some are under-represented. This impacts the culture and future of physics, and so it fits well with our year-long exploration of what physics is and how it relates to society today. Students explore these demographic differences like scientists, forming hypotheses and investigating them, a process which generally leads into a deeper exploration. This unit also reflects my belief that the ability to consider and talk about race in a diverse group is as important for our students' future success as the physics I teach them (if not even more so), and that our school is therefore a place where they must learn and practice it.

Year after year, students have confirmed that this has been both one of their favorite units of the year and one that they found most valuable. Last year, all of my students said, anonymously, that this unit was worthwhile and none said it was not worthwhile, and I've had multiple alumni write to tell me how much they appreciated this. I've even asked students who have gone on to major in physics, and all of them were glad we did this unit.

All of that said, I recognize that this is a bit of a departure from the norm in our science classes. I'm writing in part because I want you to know what goes on here, and also because I believe that learning can be more powerful when it's supported at home. I hope you'll ask your student about what they're reading, discussing and learning in class, and find ways to continue the conversations we're starting at school. I'm happy to make the reading lists that your students will be using available to anyone who would like.

On the other hand: I also recognize that some of you may have questions or think a unit like this is a bad idea. I want you to encourage you to reach out and let me know what you're thinking. This unit repeatedly prioritizes discussion across difference among students, and I value your perspective as much (and maybe even more) than anyone's. I

know it might feel harder to express confusion, concern or skepticism than support, but I wanted to encourage you as a way to try to reduce that barrier.

Additionally, I have a new idea that I'm very excited to try out: I'd like to run an evening session where you get to experience a day of the unit just as your students do...sort of an extended Back to School Night experience. I've blocked out the evening of Thursday, March 22nd, from 6:30 pm to 8:00 pm, and am preparing to run the same class I did for your students that day. Please RSVP to mrifkin@universityprep.org if you're interested and available, and I'll provide dinner for all who attend. I know that we adults have more learning to do when it comes to race, and I hope you'll be interested in exploring this with me. (I also know that not all parents and guardians can make an evening event. If you'd like to join but can't, please let me know and I'll see if I can find some alternative opportunity.)

After a year of encouraging your students to take risks and learn through challenge, I'm excited to try it myself. I hope you'll join us, through conversations with your student and/or on Thursday, March 22nd.

Go Pumas,
Moses