



Applying Kwanzaa Principles to Education: Umoja

By Educator Barnes – December 26, 2021

Kwanzaa is celebrated from December 26 to January 1. According to the book “The Seven Days of Kwanzaa” by Angela Shelf Medearis, “In 1966, Dr. Karenga created Kwanzaa, a cultural holiday based upon the ancient customs of Africa ... Dr. Karenga hoped that the things that were studied and practiced during Kwanzaa would guide African-Americans all year long.” Each day of Kwanzaa covers one of the seven Kwanzaa principles. On each day of Kwanzaa, Indy K12 will explore how these principles can be applied to education.

The first principle of Kwanzaa is Umoja which means unity. More unity is needed in education. When the pandemic first began, it seemed like everyone pulled together to do what was best for children. Teachers were praised as heroes for having to adapt to remote teaching on top of trying to help students manage their emotions during the uncertainty of a pandemic. As quickly as teachers were praised, it seemed they began to get attacked just as fast.

Parents have been fighting against other parents. Educators have been fighting against other educators. Students are taking out their aggression on each other now that school is back in session in person. Also, since remote learning ended, some of the community supports have disappeared. This discord only hurts the students.

What is most disappointing is that adults are failing to show children how to unite and work together when they disagree. It is healthy to dialogue and debate, but it should be done in a manner where people are not name-calling. People should be willing to compromise for the greater good. This is not about people compromising their moral beliefs but instead being considerate of the beliefs of others to come to an agreement to benefit everyone.

Fighting about school choice, books in the library, critical race theory, and social-emotional learning is dividing us all. The focus should be on ensuring that teachers have adequate support to deliver the best instruction. The focus should be on community members and organizations supporting schools and filling the gaps.

We need to think of the children. If the adults can't unite to improve education, where does this leave the children?