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Regarding: Classroom Comments by Katherine Sanders

The Black Parallel School Board does not condone the words, phrases and concepts expressed by Katherine Sanders to her 7th grade students. We not only find her words despicable but frown on her attempts to use the whiteness power dynamic to promote untruths regarding the use of language in modern society. The “N” word is an extremely complicated word that requires intensive study to gain even a working understanding for someone not immersed in the African American culture. The word gets further complicated as it undergoes generational shifts that require updated definitions for changing practices and usage. Sadly, Katherine Sanders has been left behind.

In listening to the recorded remarks by Katherine Sanders our organization was struck with the certainty that she was expressing her learned knowledge of the appropriateness of language to include the F..K, B...H, N....R, and Beaner words to impact a group of 12- and 13-year-old students based on her personal experience and wisdom. We were further struck by the student’s response to her comments in a cacophony of diverse voices yelling no, no, that is not true. It is obvious to our group that Katherine through the power dynamics of whiteness used her position and authority to influence a group of students who knew she was incorrect because of their learned experiences.

She seems to be void of the knowledge that she has no idea what she is talking about. According to Mills 1997, the most powerful aspect of Whiteness is how it normalizes how one functions and its invisibility to those who benefit from it.

Mark Twain expresses this notion best with the following quote:

*It ain’t what you **don’t know** that gets you in trouble.*

*It’s what you **know for sure** that just ain’t so.*

The danger here is that her classroom is her silo where too often what is said there is not challenged by a higher authority. Since she is in charge, she can not only change the rules at any time but can define them to her liking- even if she is wrong. If students do not complain teachers

with views like Ms. Sanders go on unchecked for years where they continue to mislead young adults who might believe she is right.

The Black Parallel School Board continues to push the district to develop a district wide centralized Cultural Proficiency/Competency training program that does not go away. The district must create a division for this training that includes appropriate topics and continued training for all teachers. Part of this division should include a trained crisis intervention team that can be sent immediately to those schools to interview offending staff member(s) to determine not only the impact of the racial and cultural miscues but ascertain the teachers learned knowledge, intention, and capacity for improvement. If it is determined that the teacher's beliefs are antithetical to the positive personal, social, and academic development of children they in fact should be terminated.

Cultural Proficiency/Competency (Equity) training is a must for all teachers in the SCUSD without excuses or the ability to opt-out. I admit that this kind of training can be difficult on white teachers who growing up experiencing the world and others through a lens of Whiteness have extremely limited exposure to equity. Too many find discussions of equity difficult especially when their historical myths are challenged with truths. One question our organization loved asking college students in diverse settings in our discussions of race was the following:

How often did you discuss race in your homes growing up?

Black and Brown students would say daily, Asian students would say weekly, and many White students would say never. Informationally, this puts too many White teachers behind the learning curve and puts them in the catch-up mode. Do all White teachers need to catch up? Of course, not all. However, those in the know should be understanding enough to realize that too many do and that they should just endure another training so that the district can systematize the process to ensure that all teachers are trained appropriately.

Many in our organization have been trainers and participants for over thirty years and have seen it all. Too often trainings fail because of opt out policies or giving too much voice to the participants. When whites become uncomfortable with the message they typically push back with the following:

1. The trainer does not know what he/she is talking about.
2. It does not make sense to talk about this topic.
3. It has nothing to do with my classroom or what our department is trying to achieve.
4. I already know this stuff, why do I have to participate again.
5. The presenter does not have a doctorate so he/she could not know what they are talking about.
6. Let us get to the part about what I can personally do, I am tired of listening to the statistics of how bad of a school I teach at or discussions about race.
7. I have always been a good person and great teacher; it does not make sense for me to be here.
8. We have already done this, why do we have to do it again.
9. What about the kids and their parents? I was called a racist last year so who is going to teach them.
10. If parents would get off their butts and do their jobs, we would not have to do this.
11. Oh no, it is hot in here. If it does not cool off, I will not be able to stay long.

12. I have a doctor's appointment (it is the only appointment I could get) I can only stay for the first part. (You can see them leaving as soon as the presenter brings up something uncomfortable or what they do not want to hear). Then they do not come back.

Too often districts and schools let uncomfortable teachers off the hook by allowing them to define their own process and procedures for culturally competent/proficient/equity experiences. Looking at past training ventures we conclude that this is a mistake. Since when do doctors let their patients analyze their own symptoms and then chart the diagnosis even letting patients write their own prescriptions. Since when do lawyers allow clients to determine the "defense's" position then write their own briefs and cross examine witnesses. Even sports team managers know better than to follow the advice of their team supporters. So, it just simply does not make sense to allow teachers with limited cultural proficient knowledge to decide how, when and where they participate in the training.

The Sacramento City Unified District Board Policy 5144 states that the Superintendent or designee will provide to the board an annual plan that will address the roll-out of professional development insuring that all district employees will be provide mandatory professional development in implicit bias and cultural proficiency.

Therefore, Sacramento City Unified must remove the opt-out designator for all new equity training and make it mandatory as acknowledged in the Board policy. We further recommend that Sacramento establish an Equity Institute in partnership with community organizations with the skills to form an entity that develops and facilitates the training year-round with supports that never go away. And when there are instances where staff members make the kinds of mistakes that Katherine made there is an institute with the knowledge that responds and determines the extent of a teacher's racism. Unredeemable teachers should be fired.

However, be reminded that when you start firing white teachers for racial incompetence you drive many more underground who rarely raise their heads from the sand, even during cultural competence training causing the organization more problems. Those that genuinely want to learn are now too scared to ask a clarifying question because asked wrongly can get them fired as well. Most of the district's teacher are over 40 years of age. That means they have been trained in Whiteness for as many years.

The key to a successful district effort is as Thompson and Wiegman said in 1999, making Whiteness and its practices visible dislodges White dominated power structures. They go on to say that it is necessary to detail oppressive practices so they can be reconstituted in anti-racist ways.

Lastly, we need to acknowledge that the district has a diverse student body, but the institution itself has a racially and culturally biased history. As teachers train to gain an equity perspective the district needs to create supports around the training that pushes all teachers to get better through hard work and focus. The beneficiaries are our schools, communities, and our children.

Darryl White
Chair, Black Parallel School Board