



November 16, 2021

To Whom It May Concern,

The Black Parallel School Board finds the recent racial incidents at West Campus troubling. Especially after racial incidents at McClatchy, West Campus, Kit Carson, and Roxanne Wolfe's Facebook Post. We must be truthful here though, relative to how schools operate, my administrative experience tells me there were many more incidents that occurred since 2017, but they just did not go as viral or public as the aforementioned. Racism and resultant use of the "N" word toward a Black administrator can never be tolerated on a high school campus. The Trump presidency has given rise to overt racism that we have not seen in several years. At some point one might imagine that SAC City might create relevant programs or activities to begin addressing the escalating racial divide perpetuated by right wing extremist and their white children.

But first, let's talk about exclusive programs like West Campus and McClatchy and middle and elementary school feeders. By the very nature of exclusivity, the programs create privilege for all students who participate in them.

These programs for high performing students are doomed from the start especially when there are entrance requirements that include testing.

The whole idea of testing and sorting is a Eugenics creation. The measures were developed to advantage white people and promote white supremacy at the expense of all other racial groups. Carl Brigham was a member of the Eugenics movement when he created the Scholastic Aptitude Test in 1929. The test was later changed to the Scholastic Assessment Test because of criticisms that the test was not only biased, but it did not test aptitude. SAT we now know was a worst predictor of who would be successful in college. Most colleges of note no longer base their college admissions on the SAT. Mr. Brigham is also responsible for the Advanced Placement Program or AP. The same program that uses testing and sorting measures to determine who participates in them.

It is time for white parents to speak up and comment on these issues that are now impacting their neighborhood giving them a black eye as it relates to race. Silence by the white community is akin to silently supporting racist events as stated by Ibram X. Kendi, in his book entitled How To Be an Anti-racist. He goes on to remind people there are only have two choices when it comes to making change as it relates to race and racism. You are either an anti-racist or a racist. There is no middle ground. The middle ground in their silence by the absence of a meaningful decision supports racism.

What we saw at the West Campus High School Campus not only negatively impacts the Black Community but it also embarrassing and negatively impacts the white community as well.

Based on some of our work the BPSB has observed that white children and their parents fail to dialogue in meaningful ways around issues of race, racism, and equity. No one white wants to be labeled a racist. So, it is a word to be avoided at all costs. Avoided so much that it too often is not mentioned in the home. Racism to many white people is a word that evokes shame and embarrassment. Being labeled a racist and what it means to white people is too often a topic that is avoided. Being characterized a racist by most whites is a derogatory label to be avoided at any cost.

Too often, whites tend to develop their definition of race and equity based on the way they think it should be and not by the way it really is. Their children without parental guidance tend to develop their understanding through peer networks and social media and some cultural mores. Meaningful dialogue about race or racism fails to occur and therefore doesn't add any clarity to one's position on race and racism. Robin De Angelo in her book entitled *White "Fragility"* expresses that too many whites can be fragile when it comes to discussions of race or racism. It is a very difficult subject for too many to discuss especially at home to their children.

Consequently, one of the leading questions the Black Parallel School Board asks during its trainings on race and racism to diverse groups of college students is the following:

Think about how often your parents discussed race while you were growing up?

We would then ask the following:

How many of you talked about race "Daily" while growing up? Weekly? Rarely? Not at all?

Students standing up when "Daily" was mentioned were most of the Black students and a few individuals from the People of Color (POC) category in the audience. "Weekly" were usually the LatinX, Asians and other POC. "Rarely or Not at All" were mostly white students. Some of these white students in the "Rarely" group expressed the only time race was discussed was in reaction to an event on the news. Still other whites in the audience, remember their parents telling them which neighborhoods to avoid and other words of wisdom parents' provide to keep their kids safe. No wonder so many white adults are fragile when it comes to issues of race. Through social media and other peer group participation their children are not so fragile. Without direction at home about race students make their own discoveries about it. To untrained white children, absence context the "N" word is amusing and even funny sometimes- but through their social networks they learn quickly that it could be a bomb thrown at a Black person because they feel offended or mad.

Dr. Melanie Killen, of the University of Maryland conducted a study in 2012 with K-12 students attending ethnically mixed schools to gauge student opinions about race. The study used a picture book to tell "fill in the blank" stories about racial incidents. For example, a student might get a picture that shows a white student walking down the hall with paper currency falling from their pocket. Behind the student losing the money is another student, maybe this time a Black child.

Dr. Killen then ask the student being interviewed what happens next. What makes these pictures so interesting is that the person dropping the money or following behind can be changed at random to see if students fill in the blank differently for a white student than a Black student.

She met and interviewed a student named Makayla who was from a white middleclass family. Dr. Killen in that interview noticed that Makayla continually used references to students of color that were not really flattering and, in some cases, obviously biased. Dr. Killen followed up on her conversation with Makayla by interviewing her parents to gauge their reaction. She first talked about the nature of the study and then shared the video with them featuring their daughter. When the parents watched the video, they could not believe it was their 13-year-old confidently spewing such biased and racist feelings. Their reaction was swift- they were noticeable disappointed and then shamed and embarrassed. They realized their daughter was this way because of what they did or did not do at home.

What really gives us pause is that Dr. Killen also discovered in this study that kids as young as four (4) begin to perceive skin color and learn a sense of which color is more advantageous. In her interview with a five (5) year old white male student she asked him what would happen if he invited a Black child to his home? The child responded that he couldn't because his parents would not like it. Through continued questioning she discovered that the parents would be mad about it-most probably- because his parents have never invited anybody to their home who was Black. So, the student's brain without the proper racial inputs imagined that they would be opposed to it- even though they may not have.

Our organization believes that Makayla's dynamics is not an anomaly. We believe it happens more often in white communities than not. As I said before, too many white families deal with race or racism by not talking about it. When that happens, children are left to their own devices in developing racial attitudes. Without guidance from family members students from white households tend to be more open and honest about racist thoughts- even if they are the wrong thoughts or racist thoughts. Social media just exacerbates that thinking because students just simply don't know what they don't know. They are more embolden because of the positive feedback that they think it is appropriate to use the language with anybody. Students who live in a world ruled by social media believe they can say anything to anybody at any time. I get a sense that they really believe they have a right to.

So it is easy to understand the racist taunting of Black students and the Vice Principal by white students at West Campus High School. These events are no different than those that occurred at McClatchy- Black Face and Science Fair Project incidents.

The situation we find ourselves in today at West Campus though, was a long time in the making. Many issues may be fueled by social media, but the antecedents occurred a long time ago.

History (the antecedents)

1. West Campus in the early 90's was an academically exclusive program as part of the Hiram Johnson High School campus. Nicely put it functioned as a school within a school.
2. White parents complained bitterly about the program being located on a campus with so many underperforming students and advocated to move the school and threatened that they would remove their kids from the school if the district did not find a new location.
3. Bowing to public pressure the school was moved to a campus near the Hiram Johnson High School where it presently sits.
4. West Campus has had several Black Administrators at the principal and assistant principal levels. It was not unusual to hear them continually complain about white parents pressuring them to make concessions or alter decisions they did not like. Most felt they were always on eggshells around students and parents particularly those who

were white. They also felt scrutinized for most discipline decision that they made, and too many parent concerns ended up in the superintendent's office for final negotiations.

5. Evelyn Baffico, one such African American principal was dismissed even though her tenure brought the highest test scores ever for the West Campus student body and a rise in Black student enrollment. To this date it is still not clear why she was removed. Many still believe that it was racism that led to her demise. Others say that she was not as attentive to the needs of white students that was her undoing.
6. Historically the school has always had small numbers of teachers who were Black. Presently there are no Black teachers among the teaching ranks of West Campus.
7. Most people familiar with the West Campus history believe the major problem is that the school bowing to pressure from the community allowed it to develop values and mores that surrendered district power to parents to keep them happy and their children attending school.

Fast Forward to February 2021

8. During Black History Month in February of 2021 Dr. Versher, the Black Vice Principal who has already served two years as the Assistant Principal took the responsibility to coordinate the Black History Month celebration for the whole school. Students reported that they along with the principal heard four (4) white students reflecting on the list of speakers by saying "N-----" 1, "N-----" 2, "Nigger" 3 so forth and so on. The Vice Principal immediately brought the students in and called their parents. The students were asked to complete an incident report detailing their involvement. Three of the four students admitted to using the "N" word. The student's parents made phone calls to the principal to stop the suspensions on the grounds that their children may have said it but reiterated that they and their children weren't racist. The principal surrendered his authority to the parents and asked Dr. Versher to remove the suspensions and use a restorative approach instead.
9. The principal and community without Dr. Versher in attendance met during the summer of 2021 and adjusted the school's dress code. When Dr. Versher returned from summer break she was updated regarding the dress code and told to enforce them accordingly. Following the new policies Dr. Versher did so for one female student and received a scorching backlash from the white student body. Some students were so mad and furious that they felt emboldened to call Dr. Versher the "N" Word multiple times to her face. Staff members felt that the principal did not have her back and left her to twist in the wind.
10. On social media students reacting to the dress code situation called her a Black Hitler and "N-----" B----. The backlash really got bizarre when she was verbally accosted by two former students using profane language who also threatened her with bodily harm during a recent school dance.
11. And then finally, last week, as Dr. Versher was about to open the door to her car after the long day she looked up and noticed that someone had written the "N" word multiple times on the wall in front of her car.
12. The principal did not intercede in support of his Vice Principal until it became a public relations nightmare.
13. In talking to many individuals about this situation I learned that there were specific antecedents that happened a long time ago when former superintendents allowed the community to negotiate policy, rules, discipline, and other school decisions.

Aforementioned situations 8 and 9, were poorly handled by the school's Principal. He allowed parent involvement and negotiation in issues related to school discipline and he adjusted outcomes to make them happy. Issues of race and or racism should never be handled like this. Continued failures by the principal to come to the aid of his VP quickly and promptly in situations 8 and 9 allowed students to believe they could get away with anything. From incident to incident as one would predict their behavior only got worse.

So, it is no wonder that we find ourselves in this position today. It can be said that the following events were fueled by the principal's inaction by conceding to pressure from parents.

What do we do now?

The Black Parallel School Board would like to make the following recommendations:

1. Dr. Versher should get apologies from the families of the affected students and the white portion of the West Campus family.
2. The WC principal should openly apologize to Dr. Versher for not supporting her when she was doing exactly what was expected of her.
3. The WC principal should be trained appropriately on how to handle issues of race or be reassigned to a middle or elementary school.
4. The children and their families should be forced to attend a community race seminar in return for the removal of the suspension and or expulsion.
5. West Campus should be given an equity trainer to assist the school in moving forward
6. Ensure that all students take a course in ethnic studies as part of a graduation requirements, and you may want to think about adding additional courses or integrating race and human relations concepts throughout the curriculum.
7. Develop a community institute for equity that provides a response to these kinds of issues along with supports and training to ensure it doesn't happen again. These are community problems and school districts should not have to bear the responsibility to develop the institute alone.
8. Arrest any negative push-back against Ethnic Studies and the requirement that all students participate in it.

We would like to end this piece with the following:

Accolades go to Dr. Versher for her strength to bear the burdens of racism on a school campus with few individuals who looked like her. She should be applauded for her strength of character and fortitude. For too long she has carried this weight on her shoulders- She should be applauded by all of us in all of Sac City's attendance areas.