

WHITNEY HIGH SCHOOL
BLACK ALUMNI ASSOCIATION

Dear Principal Briquelet, Assistant Principal Natividad, Dr. Sieu, Dr. Wise, Dr. Rios and ABCUSD School Board ,

We are your Whitney High School Black Alumni. We are doctors, banking executives, producers, teachers, lawyers, senior managers at Fortune 100 companies, and board members of numerous non-profit organizations. We are writing to you because it has recently come to our attention that there have been multiple incidents of hate speech towards African Americans by members of the Whitney student body over the last week or so. This behavior is not tolerated in the workplace nor should it be in an educational environment. As Black alumni of Whitney High School, this news brings us great pain and disappointment, particularly given the similar experiences so many of us had during our time at the school. As African Americans, we are frustrated that racism and hate are ongoing issues at the school. As alumni, we are disheartened that a school that we once called home has not succeeded in protecting their Black students from explicit and implicit attacks of other students. Indeed, hearing more stories from Black alumni and current students concerning microaggressions and microassaults committed by students and faculty, there are several instances of systematic disenfranchisement that have directly impacted the academic achievement, attrition, and graduation rates of African American students at Whitney High School. This is an unfortunate and shameful, yet consistent part of the Whitney High School legacy for Black students that needs to change.

The fact that there have been two different incidents where Whitney students have targeted the Black community during a time where events in Minneapolis and other places around the country underscore the violence against people of color - including instances of police brutality and racial profiling is deeply troubling. Specifically we have seen a video where a student calls a Black church and another where a student used the "N" word and stated that we should go back to Africa.

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We cannot ignore that these incidents come a short time after the infamous “mock slavery lesson” that the school initially defended amongst parent complaints and only to ultimately rescind the simulation after it received national pressure that demanded the change. To ignore the concern of Whitney parents and students but comply to demands from the community outside of Whitney is unacceptable and underscore the issue at hand, Black students at Whitney High School do not feel valued or understood within their own school community. This seems to not be a few isolated incidents but rather an issue with the school culture that must be changed. The Mission of ABC Unified School District is to develop a community of lifelong learners, creative thinkers, and responsible individuals, by providing innovative and high quality educational programs in a safe and supportive environment. It is proven through a plethora of studies conducted by the APA that students who endure racial trauma and discrimination are often unable to focus on their studies, and are more likely to self harm as a result of feeling unsafe. Through our partnership, we hope to guide these conversations and use our collective experiences as the super minority at Whitney to provide context for the Black student experience. As alumni, we know something your Black students know all too well. Black students are the super-minority at Whitney. Attending Whitney is an emotional roller coaster for any student dealing with the pressures of academic success, the maturation process from elementary school graduate to high school graduate, and the daily pressures of being a teenager. These effects are amplified when you are one of a handful; one that is seen as vulnerable at times to bullying by the student body, staff and teachers. Many times we struggle to have a safe place to express our feelings and our outrage at racist interactions. We are left to discuss it amongst our small group or maybe seek out someone who we hope to be an ally amongst the faculty. It should not be this way. It cannot be this way. Not in 2020. All students should feel safe and protected.

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Let us be clear. This is not an attack on Whitney High School. We do not want to rush to judgement or participate in a witch hunt. We are gravely concerned about what we are hearing. We need answers. We need to ensure there is accountability for past grievances. However, as a collective-we want to be part of a positive change.

We request that you inform of us the following:

- How often is diversity and inclusion training provided to WHS faculty;
- What extensive training did the WHS faculty receive in the wake of the mock slavery simulation provided to the 8th grade students;
- What policies, guidelines, and disciplinary actions are in place for students and/or faculty that utilize social media to spread messages of racism and hate;
- What discipline did the students receive who were involved in the two recent incidents of hate speech;
- What steps are WHS taking to make sure their Black students feel supported and protected;
- What curriculum is implemented and being used to teach Black history and anti-bias curriculum?
- Why has WHS not come out with a statement on their social media accounts and an email to the student body in direct support of the Black community and denouncing hateful rhetoric and behavior;
- What is WHS introducing to its curriculum to enrich its students about Black culture;

AND

- What ongoing analyses of disciplinary action and educational outcome disparities for minority students are being conducted?

While we have questions, we also want to be a part of the change.

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In true Whitney spirit, we want to be difference makers. We would offer the following:

- *Meeting with Principal Briquet and Dr. Wise to address our concerns;*
- *Assist WHS in establishing an Black Alumni group to help support its African American student body;*
- *Participation in WHS career day events;*
- *Participate in a discussion with the students who engaged in hate speech regarding the lessons they could learn from their actions;*

AND

- *Participation in a WHS diversity committee to enhance a culture of acceptance and inclusion.*

While being sensitive to the experiences of every student, past and present, creating a culture of empathy, equity, and inclusion would benefit every student at Whitney as a whole. Addressing the anti-Black culture at Whitney would also encompass providing a space for equity and inclusion for the Latinx population, as well as students in the LGBTQIA community.

Racist bullying impacts the:

- *student experiencing racist bullying and their sense of belonging to the school community*
- *students witnessing this form of bullying*
- *parents and families of children who are experiencing racist bullying*
- *wider school community and school culture*

Hate speech, discrimination, and prejudice has no place in our society, and certainly no place in our schools.

Thank you for allowing us this opportunity to voice our concerns. We look forward to having our questions answered and ensuring that Whitney High School is a safe place for everyone.

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Respectfully Yours,

The Whitney High School Black Alumni Association

- 1. Dr. Stephen Glass, Educator, Class of 1986*
- 2. Kiyana Harris-Turner, MPH, Senior Business Development Manager - Amazon, Class of 2003*
- 3. Dr. Tijani Hassan, Diagnostic Radiologist - Focus Medical Imaging, Class of 2002*
- 4. Fetle Negash, Manager, Physical Production - ViacomCBS, Class of 2003*
- 5. Gary Polk Esq., Deputy District Attorney - Riverside County, Class of 2001*
- 6. Megan Ashley-King Mitchell, M.A.Ed, Educator, Class of 2003*
- 7. Candis Hughes, M.S., Class of 2002*
- 8. Jennifer Prudhomme, Senior Commercial E-Commerce Manager, Class of 2003*
- 9. Ashley Gammage, M.B.A.- Account Development Manager - American Express, Class of 2004*
- 10. Khalif Boyd, Manager, Actor, Class of 2005*
- 11. Lasondra Wilson, Business Owner- Yellowcake Desserts, Class of 2004*
- 12. Brittney Nalty Jones, M.S., PA-C, Cardiology Physician Assistant, Class of 2005*
- 13. Dr. Stephanie Brown, Psy.D., L.P., Clinical Psychologist, Class of 2003*
- 14. Tiyi Christopher, Special Education Educator - KIPP Morial Primary, Class of 2015*
- 15. Rachel Wyley, Executive Director - Peer Health Exchange, Class of 2005*
- 16. Yasmine Diara, Global Health Policy Specialist- Gavi, The Vaccine Alliance, Class of 2015*
- 17. Nicole Houston, Public Health Consultant, Class of 2004*
- 18. Adrienne Ford, Account Executive - Republic Services, Class of 2002*
- 19. Sushila Love, Television and Film Editor, Class of 1999*
- 20. Eryn Burnett, Customer Service Specialist - City of Cypress, Class of 2016*
- 21. Stephen "Iggy" Igwe - Math support teacher, Actor, Class of 1997*
- 22. Tontra Love - Teacher*
- 23. NeTonya Seidel - Realtor*
- 24. Obinna Udeh, Resident Assistant - Cal Poly Pomona, Class of 2019*

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25. Dwight Curry III

26. Shiraya Thompson, M.S. Candidate - UCLA, Class of 2015

27. Ashley Duru, Pharm.D. Candidate - USC, Class of 2014

28. Esther Anene, M.S., Clinical Research Coordinator - Williams Panlab, Stanford University School of Medicine, Department of Psychiatry, Class of 2015

29. Laurel Woodward, Class of 1990

30. Debra Logan, M.A. Ed, Former WHS Teacher and Counselor

31. Ricardo Raphael Williams II, B.S. Computer Science - Software Engineer at Microsoft, Class of 2015

32. Jessica Rofo Esq., Professor NYU Law School, Class of 2002

33. Chizobam Okoro, BSN, MSN, Clinical Care Coordinator, Class of 2000

