



# EQUITY NOW!

VOLUME I, NO. 2 (SEPTEMBER 2017)

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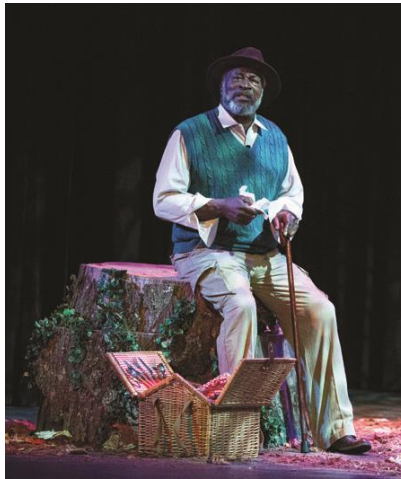
PO Box 762

Maplewood, NJ 07040

## HELP US SUPPORT BLACK STUDENTS

**We need your support!** Please purchase tickets to our first-ever fundraiser. Noted actor **John Amos**, seen in *Roots*, *Coming to America*, *Let's Do it Again* and in the iconic television series *Good Times*) will grace the stage in the one-man play "*Halley's Comet*" on **Saturday October 7 at 6:00 pm** at South Orange Middle School. He has performed this play across the country to wave reviews.

Mr. Amos is graciously lending his talents gratis to the Black Parents Workshop as a show of support for our work and that of the **MapSO Freedom School**. Your purchase of tickets will help us continue to advocate for Black children in Maplewood and South Orange, and expand the programs we are able to offer for parents and children.



Tickets are **\$30** for the performance only or **\$40** for those who wish to meet Mr. Amos. This is a great play for the entire family. Please bring your family and friends as we celebrate Black student achievement in our community.

For tickets, go to the home page of the Black Parents Workshop website – [www.blackparentsworkshop.org](http://www.blackparentsworkshop.org) – or call us @ **(201) 259-8375**.

## A SCHOOL START CHECK-IN

Now that the 2017-2018 school year is underway, we want to suggest a quick check-in to make certain that you are prepared to support your student this year, and be an effective advocate for your child.

**Have you spoken to your child and gained a sense of how she/he feels about the teachers assigned to his or her classes?**

This is important because teachers early on in the year send subtle messages about their teaching philosophy and often infer how they feel about individual students in their mannerisms, comments, and communication.



### **Have you personally reached out to your child's teachers to introduce yourself?**

Too often parents wait until there is some indication of trouble with their child's academic performance before communicating with their teachers. We advise you to send an e-mail to each one of your child's teachers and introduce yourself, tell the teacher about your child's interests, and ask the teacher what her or his goals are for the class and how (e.g. tests, quizzes, term papers, class participation) grades are awarded. **Do not assume anything.** You must be proactive in advancing your child's interests in the classroom.

### **Are you aware of what "level" courses your child has been assigned?**

**The South Orange-Maplewood School District has an over two-decade history of discriminating against Black students by tracking them into lower-level courses.** This is a practice the Black Parents Workshop continues to fight and monitors the district's compliance with a U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights Resolution Agreement it signed to end these practices. You know your child's capabilities and can gauge their potential better than anyone inside the school district. **Do not allow your child to be placed in classes that are beneath their talents.** You must insist that your child is placed in academically challenging courses. Research shows that students who take advanced level and Advanced Placement (AP) courses are better prepared for college and the workforce.

### **Is your child involved in an extra-curricular activity?**

If not, we strongly advise you to encourage their participation. The school experience should be more than the classroom. Joining clubs or participating in a sport are ways in which your child can learn valuable lessons in leadership and team-building; lessons that can't be imparted in the classroom. These activities also build confidence and are a very important tool in preparing young people for life beyond the school building. Why do you think the nation's so-called "elite" institutions of higher learning also invest heavily in athletics? One of the greatest citizens our state has produced is **Paul Robeson**, a scholar-athlete, lawyer, actor, singer, and human rights activist. We must encourage our children to embrace all of their talents.

We also strongly urge you to have your child join the Black Student Union at Columbia High School. This is a very important organization that serves as an advocate for the interests of Black students in the high school.

### **If your child is a sophomore or junior in Columbia High School, be aware of important dates.**

Make sure you are aware of the dates when college entrance examinations, the SAT and ACT, are being administered. We also recommend that you put your child in a prep course for these examinations. Historically, Black students have not scored well on standardized tests but this can be overcome by proper preparation. The Black Parents Workshop is exploring the possibility of sponsoring a prep session for each of these examinations. While many colleges and universities are lessening their reliance on the SAT and ACT, a solid score on these tests not only enhances admissions prospects but also aids in the securing of academic scholarships.

#### **SAT Dates** ([www.collegeboard.org](http://www.collegeboard.org))

October 7, 2017 (Late Registration Deadline: September 27, 2017)

November 4, 2017 (Deadline: October 5, 2017)

December 2, 2017 (Deadline: November 2, 2017)

March 10, 2018\*\* (Deadline: February 9, 2018)

May 5, 2018 (Deadline: April 6, 2018)

June 2, 2018 (Deadline: May 3, 2018)

\*\*Regular SAT only

## **ACT Dates** ([www.act.org](http://www.act.org))

October 28, 2017 (Deadline: September 22, 2017)

December 9, 2017 (Deadline: November 3, 2017)

February 10, 2018\*\* (Deadline: January 12, 2018)

April 14, 2018 (Deadline: March 9, 2018)

June 9, 2018 (Deadline: May 4, 2018)

\*\*No test centers in New York for this date

### **If your child is a student-athlete, be aware of the athletics recruiting process.**

It's a wonderful thing when your child can secure an athletic scholarship to a college or university. They are a significant vehicle to reduce some or all of the costs of a college education. They are available to high school student-athletes whose talents are compatible with the demands of NCAA Division I and Division II athletic programs. Division III colleges and Ivy League schools do not offer athletic scholarships. If your child is eligible, visit the websites of the institutions they are interested in attending or have sent them letters of interest, and find out what the athletic standards are to receive an athletic scholarship. **Make certain that you always make the academic compatibility of the college with your child's educational goals the priority.** Get the advice of his or her coach BUT make sure the college is one that your child will feel comfortable attending. On recruitment trips, be an active listener and be prepared to ask coaches about the team's philosophy on academic support, and the graduation rate of athletes. What is most important is their receiving a college degree.

### **Make the Guidance Department work for you.**

Your child should not be left to figure their academic plan on their own. **You must make the guidance department in your school work for your child.** They are there to provide advice, help make certain academic requirements are fulfilled, and intervene when students encounter difficulty in the classroom.

### **Don't accept silence as an answer!**

Too often parents accept silence or an unsatisfactory response from teachers or a school administrator when making an inquiry concerning their child. Make sure you get answers to your questions, and request that responses to your inquiries are put in writing. You are a parent and taxpayer. **Demand answers.** Employees of the school district are public employees, paid by our tax dollars, and legally obligated to serve the public.

Please know we are here to help. If you encounter an issue with your child and you believe it is based on racial bias, please contact us via our website – [www.blackparentsworkshop.org](http://www.blackparentsworkshop.org) – or send us an e-mail @ [blackparentsworkshop@gmail.com](mailto:blackparentsworkshop@gmail.com). **We are here to be partners in your child's success.**

## **CURRICULUM CHANGES**

At the last summer meeting of the Board of Education in August, and in an 11<sup>th</sup> hour maneuver, a new middle school social studies curriculum was adopted. The Black Parents Workshop took issue with this given that the suspect K-5 curriculum was left intact. Black Parents Workshop chairman Walter Fields met with interim superintendent Dr. Thomas Ficarra over the lack of transparency in the process, and seeking answers to how the curriculum was developed and who was involved. Many of those questions remain unanswered but we are preparing a letter to Assistant Superintendent Susan Grierson and will not allow those questions to remain unanswered.

## MAPLEWOOD POLICE UPDATE

Over the summer, we successfully advocated for the release of police videotape and audio transmissions related to the July 5, 2016 Independence Day fireworks event incident. As a result of the public release of this evidence, the Township Committee of Maplewood unanimously demanded the resignations of Chief Robert Cimino and Captain Joshua Cummis. In the aftermath of this incident, one youth has filed a federal civil rights lawsuit against the police department and township.



Kudos to MapSO Freedom School founder and Columbia High School teacher **Thomas (T.J.) Whitaker** (pictured above) for being a persistent voice on behalf of youth whose rights were violated on July 5, 2016. He and Black Parents Workshop Chairman Walter Fields recently met with acting Chief Jimmy DeVaul and engaged in a very open, candid and productive discussion on improving policing in our community and building better relations between the police and youth. We agreed on taking several initial steps to open up lines of communication and start the process of restoring faith in the department.

### **MapSO Citizens Truth & Reconciliation Commission**

As an outgrowth of the July 5, 2016 incident, the Black Parents Workshop and the MapSO Freedom School has established the MapSO Citizens Truth & Reconciliation Commission, modeled after the South African experience. The commission will conduct two hearings to give citizens the opportunity to share their encounters with local police in Maplewood and South Orange. We are particularly interested in hearing from our youth. The testimony will be transcribed and a written record provided to the office of the New Jersey Attorney General and the U.S. Attorney.

Our first hearing, which will focus on the Maplewood police, was postponed to give student leaders more time to organize students to attend. Acting police Chief Jimmy DeVaul has agreed to attend the hearing in a listening capacity. We will announce the new date for the first hearing in the coming weeks.

## COMING EVENTS

### Legal Workshop for Parents of Special Needs Students

We will host a legal workshop for parents of special needs students on **Saturday September 30th** at **10 am** in the **Maplewood Community Center in DeHart Park**. We will have attorneys present who can answer questions regarding the rights of parents who have children with learning disabilities. **Please spread the word.**

### Fall Fundraiser

Our friend, noted television and film actor **John Amos**, has graciously offered to perform his one-man play "*Halley's Comet*" as a fundraiser for the Black Parents Workshop. It is a play that he has performed around the country and centers on an elderly Black man's relationship to the comet in terms of his life experiences. The event will be held on **Saturday October 7th** at **6:00 pm** in the **South Orange Middle School auditorium**. We have created an event committee to help plan this function. If you are interested in serving on that committee, please send us a note at **blackparentsworkshop@gmail.com**.



### November School Board Election

This November the School Board election – **Tuesday November 7, 2016** - will present us with the opportunity to elect three candidates to the Board of Education. Our goal is to support and help facilitate the election of three progressive candidates who support the tenets of access and equity, and specifically the removal of structural barriers that historically have denied Black children a fair and equal educational experience in the South Orange-Maplewood School District.

The Black Parents Workshop and the **MapSO Freedom School** will host an **Equity and Access Board of Education Candidates Forum** at **7:00 pm** on **Thursday October 26th** at the main Maplewood Library on Baker Street. Please mark your calendars and plan to attend. This forum will focus solely on the issues of equity and access, and the plight of Black children in the district.

We encourage you to make certain your friends and children of age are registered to vote. You can download a voter registration form from the bottom of the Civic Engagement page on our website. If you have a child who is out-of-state attending college, please make sure they complete an absentee ballot. Every vote is going to be necessary in November to achieve our goal of changing the direction of the school Board. As we get closer to Election Day we will announce our get-out-the-vote plans and Election Day information.

## DONATE

Your contributions help us grow and do more for our youth. Contributions are tax-deductible through our fiscal conduit, Sidewalk University. Checks should be made payable to **Black Parents Workshop** and in the memo line write Sidewalk University. Checks can be mailed to: Black Parents Workshop, P.O. Box 762, Maplewood New Jersey, 07040. Contributions can also be made online through PayPal on our website.



**Our mission is to serve Black children, and by doing so, uplift all children.**

## Contact Us

### **SOMA Black Parents Workshop**

PO Box 762  
Maplewood, NJ 07040  
(201) 259-8375

for the Black Parents Workshop. We also collaborate with other organizations and have a special relationship with the **MapSO Freedom School**, and we also work to support Black student organizations in the district.

## HOW CAN YOU HELP?

There are many ways you can help the Black Parents Workshop serve as a powerful advocate for Black children in the South Orange-Maplewood School District and our two communities. The first way is by encouraging other parents to become a part of our network by submitting their contact information. They can do so by submitting their information through our website or you can submit it. The second way is by reporting to us any incidents in which you believe your child or a child that you know has been subjected to discriminatory treatment (e.g. discipline, assignment to a class below her or his capabilities, grading, bullying by a teacher or staff member, or denial of resources as a special education student) in school. You can find a Parent Incident Report form on our website at the bottom of the Access and Equity page. Fill out the form and describe the incident, and return the form to us.

Third, we would like to have at least four Black parents attend every meeting of the Board of Education. They are held monthly at the Board headquarters in Maplewood. We would like to form a Watch Committee on which members will rotate to attend Board meetings. You would attend to observe and take notes. Send us an email if you would like to be on the Watch Committee. Fourth, inform us when a Black student in the district has had a significant accomplishment. We want to celebrate our young people and publicize their success. Look at the *Speak Out* section of our website and you will see how we highlight our children. Finally, share with us your ideas to make the South Orange-Maplewood School District better. The only bad idea is the one that is not shared.

*Where there is no struggle, there is no progress – Frederick Douglass*

## VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

We are planning a number of events this year that require volunteer support. Please consider lending us your time as we work to support Black children in our community. If you are interested in becoming a volunteer, please send us a note @ [blackparentsworkshop@gmail.com](mailto:blackparentsworkshop@gmail.com).

## GROW THE BLACK PARENT COMMUNITY

Tell your friends and neighbors to sign up to receive information from the Black Parents Workshop. Have them send us their contact info @ [blackparentsworkshop@gmail.com](mailto:blackparentsworkshop@gmail.com).

## HOW WE OPERATE

The Black Parents Workshop is a not-for-profit organization that is incorporated in the state of New Jersey. We are currently using Sidewalk University as our fiscal conduit. This allows contributions to the Workshop to be tax-exempt. Until we receive our IRS 501(c)3 certification, we can still accept contributions that will be treated as tax-exempt.

To date we have operated as a strictly volunteer-driven organization. Our short-term (12-18 month) plan is to secure funding to support a paid staff to manage the day-to-day business of the organization.

We are not a membership organization but we operate as an advocacy organization that raises concerns unique to Black parents. From time to time, we will hold general information sessions to inform parents of developments in the school district. We are guided by a Board of Trustees that sets policy