

# Elementary students hold mock slave auction during class



By **Jessica Mazzola** | NJ Advance Media for NJ.com

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**MAPLEWOOD** -- A **debate over how to educate** students about the history of slavery in America was reignited last week when South Orange Maplewood school district officials say elementary students held a mock slave auction while under the supervision of a substitute teacher.

According to a note sent home to parents in the **Jefferson School** class, the teacher was out after a dental surgery when some students "used creative license" to present a project on the Triangular Slave Trade, a topic in the class's colonization unit.

The students orchestrated a mock slave auction, asked classmates to participate, and filmed the project, the note said.

"While I understand the creative effort, and the impact it had upon the students who viewed this, I used it as a teachable moment to elaborate on the gravity of this part of our history," the teacher, who viewed the video after returning to school, wrote in the letter to parents.

"I was concerned about the students who viewed and participated in this re-enactment and would like to convey this event to you so we can address the students' perceptions as a whole," she wrote.

The students had been tasked with researching various aspects of a colony and presenting a PowerPoint to the class.

A spokeswoman for the district, Suzanne Turner, said administrators will look into "training and improved supervisory protocols" for substitute teachers in light of the incident, but praised the teacher's response when she returned to school.



## Slave auction poster assignment draws concern

"The activity was not part of the curriculum, not part of the teacher's assignment, not condoned by the teacher, not authorized by the district," Turner said.

"Upon hearing about the impromptu re-enactment and video while she was out, the teacher proactively reached out to parents to inform them not only of what had happened, but also how she was addressing this with students."

ADVERTISING

The letter last week was **on the heels of a controversial project** at the South Mountain School, another elementary school in the district, that allowed students **to draw slave auction posters** as part of their colonization project.

Some parents who saw the posters hanging in the schools' hallways came out against the project, prompting the district to plan for a community discussion about social justice, race relations, and the social issues and impacts of educating kids about slavery and other topics.

The school has since taken the posters down, but says parents remain split on whether or not they were an appropriate assignment.

The town hall meeting on the issues has not yet been scheduled, Turner said last week.

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Education • Perspective

# Two high schools with similar demographics, yet different outcomes



By **Jay Mathews** Columnist December 24

I first learned of Jordan Fields, an African American student at a New Jersey high school, in 2014 when she was struggling to get into the best math classes so she could become an engineer.

Despite excellent middle school grades and scores, she had to fight to get into ninth-grade geometry. When she needed help in Algebra 2 the next year, her teacher instead allegedly told her parents “she just doesn’t seem to get it” and suggested she choose a less demanding career.

That apparent reluctance to support minority students led to the creation of the Black Parents Workshop to make changes in the relatively affluent South Orange and Maplewood school district. The school board was unfortunately not cooperative. It fired an independent consultant hired to recommend how to comply with a federal civil rights agreement, and instead gave the job to a district staffer. The data it eventually released showed racial disparities in some instances as bad as before.

Fields managed to take two Advanced Placement courses, calculus and English, despite the warning that she was in over her head. She is now a sophomore at the University of Pittsburgh, but her high school is still stuck with biased assumptions about student potential.

Despite promises to provide more challenges, not everyone at Fields’s alma mater, Columbia High, seems to understand what that means. The school lets students and their families decide whether to take demanding courses, unlike more successful schools that try to persuade timid students with potential to try something harder. Students struggling early in AP can drop to a lower course, something AP teachers I know consider a bad idea.

District spokeswoman Suzanne Turner said the district “is actively working to address the underlying issues which have previously contributed to disparate placements and outcomes for students.” The district expressed the same optimism to me three years ago, and I don’t see much improvement compared with similar schools.

“Since the majority of African American students are stuck in Level 3 classes,” said Walter Fields, a journalist who specializes in civil rights and is Jordan Fields’s father, “they are hesitant to enroll in an AP course, nor are they encouraged.”

Most high schools in the Washington area removed those barriers two decades ago. But they are an exception. Few districts have parent groups like the Black Parents Workshop with the insight and will to overcome ingrained low expectations.

Compare Columbia High with James Hubert Blake High School in Montgomery County, Md. Columbia has about 1,850 students, 45 percent of them black. Blake has about 1,600 students, 41 percent of them black. At Columbia, 21 percent of the students are from low-income families. At Blake, the portion is 35 percent.

Yet on The Washington Post’s 2017 America’s Most Challenging High Schools list, Blake is far ahead of Columbia. It has an AP-tests-to-graduating-seniors ratio of 2.833 (ranked 805 out of 22,000 U.S. schools). Columbia’s ratio is 1.882 (ranked 1,502). Blake’s percentage of seniors with passing grades on AP tests is also higher.

The Black Parents Workshop points to signs of racial insensitivity. When a school dance group performed to Billie Holiday’s song about lynching, “Strange Fruit,” a group of white teachers complained that it made them feel unsafe in the auditorium. Last month, the only African American student in an honors class was falsely accused by his teacher of being on drugs — leading to a search of his body and locker — after he laughed with other students about his correct answers to several questions, the parents group says.

The Black Parents Workshop protested when one African American student, despite his teacher’s and his counselor’s support, was told he couldn’t take an honors history class. They did the same when another African American student was barred from taking honors geometry.

Interim superintendent Thomas Ficarra overruled both decisions. But seeing few improvements, the parent group has announced it will sue the district in state court for violating state and federal civil rights laws.

Those in charge at Columbia High should visit Blake High. It is worth the three-hour drive to see good examples of what students from all backgrounds can do when the entire staff believes in them.

 **30 Comments**

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Jay Mathews is an education columnist and blogger for the Washington Post, his employer for 40 years.

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# EQUITY NOW!

A NEW DIRECTION FOR THE SOUTH ORANGE-MAPLEWOOD SCHOOL DISTRICT

**ELECTION  
EDITION**

## The Incumbents

*Experienced in Failing our Students*



**Elizabeth Baker**

- ✓ Failed to comply with the U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights Resolution Agreement
- ✓ Failed to put in place programs to address the persistent racial achievement gap
- ✓ Failed to address de facto segregation in the district's K-5 schools
- ✓ Allowed the "Access and Equity" and "Academic Placement" policies to be undermined by the district's Guidance Department

- ✓ Maintained the system of hyper-leveling despite OCR and ACLU data showing how it contributes to denying Black students' access to advanced level and Advanced Placement (AP) courses
- ✓ Defended the 5th grade social studies lesson during which students created posters depicting slave auctions without proper guidance or context for the lesson
- ✓ Failed to address the district's crumbling physical infrastructure



**Donna Smith**

- ✓ Failed to address the continued placement of elementary school students in portable classrooms
- ✓ Supported giving former Superintendent Dr. John Ramos a bonus despite the failings of his leadership
- ✓ Remained silent when informed that students were assaulted by the Maplewood police on July 5, 2016

**Is this the "experience" we need to improve our school system?**

**The Black Parents Workshop  
Says No!**

**ON NOVEMBER 7 VOTE FOR A NEW DIRECTION**

[www.blackparentsworkshop.org](http://www.blackparentsworkshop.org)

Table I.

## Historical Table

**Minority Student Enrollment - SOMSD**

<b>School</b>	<b>1976-1977</b>	<b>1977-1978</b>	<b>1978-1979</b>
<b>Maplewood Middle School</b>			
Total Students	819	780	781
Minority Enrollment	<b>41</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>74</b>
Minority as Percentage of Enrollment	5%	4.75%	9.50%
<b>South Orange Middle School</b>			
Total Students	929	872	830
Minority Enrollment	<b>83</b>	<b>107</b>	<b>121</b>
Minority as Percentage of Enrollment	8.9%	12.3%	14.6
<b>Jefferson Elementary School</b>			
Total Students	546	478	472
Minority Enrollment	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>9</b>
Minority as Percentage of Enrollment	1.5%	1.9%	1.9%
<b>Seth Boyden Elementary School</b>			
Total Students	409	403	345
Minority Enrollment	<b>27</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>22</b>
Minority as Percentage of Enrollment	6.6%	7.8%	6.41%
<b>Marshall Elementary School</b>			
Total Students	374	365	353
Minority Enrollment	<b>51</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>83</b>
Minority as Percentage of Enrollment	13.6%	18.9%	23.5%
<b>Montross Elementary School</b>			
Total Students	199	177	164
Minority Enrollment	<b>33</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>38</b>
Minority as Percentage of Enrollment	16.6%	15.8%	23.2%

Table II.

YEAR	Clinton	Jefferson	Marshall	Boyd	So. Mountain	Tuscan	Montross	NMMS	SOMS	CHS
Percentage of Student Population by Race/Ethnicity										
<b>2011-2012</b>										
White	47.2	57.3	58.7	33.7	61.3	65.4		48.2	45.2	38.5
Black	35	29.2	25.3	54.3	21.7	19.4		41.8	46.2	38.5
Asian	5.4	4.2	3.3	2.7	5.1	4.6		3.5	4.3	3.3
Hispanic	8.2	7	5.4	6	5.5	7.4		5.6	3.4	4.8
<b>2012-2013</b>										
White	49.2	57.1	61.8	30.5	62.7	67.2		50.1	48	38.1
Black	31.6	27.3	20.5	57.4	19.4	18.1		40.8	41.2	51.9
Asian	5.3	4.3	3.3	1.7	4.2	3.7		3.1	4.4	3.9
Hispanic	7.9	6.7	7.2	6.9	5.7	7.4		5.4	5.1	5.2
<b>2013-2014</b>										
White	48.8	58	63.7	30.9	62.4	66		52.3	50.6	39.7
Black	31.5	25	20.2	56.5	17.7	18.3		37.2	37.3	50.1
Asian	5.4	4.8	3.1	1.3	4.5	3.3		3.4	4.2	3.7
Hispanic	8.1	5.9	6.9	7.2	6	6.9		6.7	6.3	5.2
<b>2014-2015</b>										
White	51.2	56	65.3	27.4	60.5	65.9		50.7	52.4	41.6
Black	27.5	27.8	18.3	59.6	17.4	18.9		38.4	34.7	47.7
Asian	6.7	3.5	2.9	1.1	5.2	3.1		3.5	4.2	3.4
Hispanic	7.8	6	6.9	8	6.5	6.6		6.1	6.6	6.1
<b>2015-2016</b>										
White	56.4	59.3	64.6	22.4	64.2	66		53.4	51.9	44.7
Black	23	23.1	19.4	65.4	16.7	17.5		34.6	32.5	44.5
Asian	6.8	3.7	4	1	4.5	2.5		3.7	4	3.8
Hispanic	8.9	6.3	5.8	6.9	6.3	8.3		16	7	5.6

Source: NJ School Performance Report Cards  
New Jersey Department of Education



Table III.  
Racial Composition of SOMSD Staff\*

SCHOOL	WHITE		BLACK		OTHER HISPANIC	
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
<b>High School</b>						
Columbia High School	82	64	23	13	7	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Middle Schools</b>						
Maplewood Middle School	35	17	13	6	7	2
South Orange Middle School	47	16	14	7	6	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>K-5 Elementary Schools</b>						
Tuscan Elementary School	45	5	6	1	2	0
South Mountain Elementary	33	5	4	0	0	0
Seth Boyden Elementary School	48	2	6	1	1	0
Clinton Elementary School	45	6	6	1	2	0
Jefferson Elementary School	35	4	8	2	1	1
Marshall Elementary School	33	4	9	1	1	1
South Mountain Annex	15	0	1	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>254</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Early Childhood Program</b>						
Montross Early Childhood Center	13	0	1	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Transportation</b>						
	0	0	9	8	2	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Maintenance</b>						
	0	5	0	2	0	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3</b>

\* Teachers and school staff



Table IV.  
SOMSD Course Enrollment by Race

2017-2018

STUDENT ENROLLMENT

COURSE	WHITE	BLACK	OTHER
<b>6th Grade Mathematics</b>			
6th	45	82	32
6th Honors	133	56	48
8th Math Honors	85	18	25
<b>7th Grade Mathematics</b>			
7th Grade Mathematics	35	75	15
7th Grade Honors	135	54	47
Algebra I - Advanced	99	14	27
<b>8th Grade Mathematics</b>			
8th (?)	19	62	16
8th Honors	83	46	23
Algebra 1	74	15	23
Geometry - Advanced	80	13	30
<b>Language Arts</b>			
Level 5	0	0	0
<b>9th Grade Mathematics</b>			
Algebra I - Level 2	0	0	0
Algebra I-College Prep	18	78	12
Algebra1 - Honors	77	57	30
Geometry Honors	37	13	8
Geometry - Advanced	89	10	12
Algebra 2- Advanced	67	3	8
<b>Sciences</b>			
Biology - College Prep	32	108	23
Biology - Honors	261	62	50

Source

South Orange Maplewood School District

Table IV.  
SOMSD Course Enrollment by Race

2017-2018

STUDENT ENROLLMENT

COURSE	WHITE	BLACK	OTHER
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9th Grade (cont.)

Social Studies

College Prep	31	102	21
Honors	260	64	50

Language Arts

College Pep*	10.3	52.2	31.9
Honors*	89.7	47.8	68.1
English 2	0	0	0

\* There is no explanation why actual numbers were not provided by the Board of Education for these courses

10th Grade

Mathematics

Geometry - Level 2	1	23	1
Geometry - College Prep	14	58	7
Geometry - Honors	55	50	10
Geometry - Advanced	13	1	3
Algebra 2 - Level 2	1	6	3
Algebra 2- College Prep	1	4	0
Algebra 2 -Advanced	61	11	8
Pre-Calculus - Honors	24	3	0
Pre-Calculus - Advanced	54	6	8

Sciences

Physics - Level 2	1	32	4
Physics - College Prep	21	73	4
Physics - Honors	107	62	19
Physics - Advanced	125	12	17

Language Arts

College Prep	13	85	6
Honors	241	111	40
Advanced Placement	8	1	1

Source

South Orange Maplewood School District



Table IV.  
SOMSD Course Enrollment by Race

2017-2018

STUDENT ENROLLMENT

COURSE                      WHITE      BLACK      OTHER

11th Grade  
Mathematics

Algebra 2 - Level 2	1	11	0
Algebra 2 - College Prep	18	39	8
Algebra 2 - Honors	61	33	10
Algebra 2 - Advanced	15	7	3
Pre-Calculus Honors	26	13	9
Pre-Calculus - Advanced	31	11	9
Calculus - AB	14	3	0
Calculus - BC	43	4	9

Sciences

Chemistry - Level 2	1	12	1
Chemistry - College Prep	9	43	9
Chemistry - Honors	99	46	18
Chemistry - AP	26	6	8
Chemistry - Advanced	86	23	14

Social Studies

College Prep	9	56	6
Honors	153	96	36
Advanced Placement	105	27	19

Language Arts

College Prep	13	85	6
Honors	241	111	40
Advanced Placement	8	1	1

Grade 12  
Mathematics

Pre-Calculus - College Prep	15	41	9
Pre-Calculus - Honors	60	49	8
Pre-Calculus - Advanced	21	7	3
Calculus Honors	19	9	3
Calculus - AB	14	10	5
Calculus - BC	17	2	2
Calculus III - Linear	26	2	5

Source

South Orange Maplewood School District

Table IV.  
SOMSD Course Enrollment by Race

2017-2018

**COURSE**  
**STUDENT ENROLLMENT**  
**WHITE    BLACK    OTHER**

**12th Grade Mathematics (cont.)**

Linear Algebra	25	2	5
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**Sciences**

Biology - AP	48	22	10
Chemistry - AP	2	10	2
Environmental Sciences - AP	52	13	4
Physics - AP	16	0	5

**Science Electives**

Astronomy - Honors	16	11	3
Bio Senior - Advanced	5	4	4
Bio-Chemistry - Honors	14	14	4
Environmental Science - CP	21	23	2
Forensic Science	41	74	16
Physics 2 - Honors	5	5	2

**Social Studies**

College Prep	2	14	2
Honors	137	138	27
Advanced Placement	147	65	21

**Language Arts**

College Prep	8	26	6
Honors	196	148	45
Advanced Placement	27	10	4

This is data presented by the  
SOMSD Board of Education at its  
October 16, 2017 meeting.



Table V. - PARCC SPRING 2017  
LANGUAGE ARTS - GRADE 3

Elementary School	Race/Status Students	Valid Scores	Mean Scale Score	Expectations				
				Level 1 Not Yet Meeting	Level 2 Partially Meeting	Level 3 Approaching	Level 4 Meeting	Level 5 Exceeding
Seth Boyden Elementary	Black	56	741	10.7	21.4	28.6	37.5	1.8
	White	22	784	0	13.6	0	59.1	27.3
	Disabilities	13	716	38.5	38.5	7.7	15.4	0
Jefferson Elementary	Black	33	742	15.2	24.2	21.2	30.3	9.1
	White	106	781	0.9	4.7	12.3	60.4	21.7
	Disabilities	13	723	7.7	53.8	23.1	15.4	0
South Mountain Annex	Black	21	740	9.5	23.8	28.6	38.1	0
	White	56	768	0	5.4	19.6	69.6	5.4
	Disabilities	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Clinton Elementary	Black	16	748	6.3	18.8	18.8	56.3	0
	White	58	787	0	5.2	10.3	55.2	29.3
	Disabilities	14	753	7.1	14.3	14.3	64.3	0
Tuscan Elementary	Black	16	733	12.5	25	43.8	12.5	6.3
	White	67	775	3	3	13.4	59.7	20.9
	Disabilities	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
District	Black	142	741	11.3	22.5	27.5	35.2	3.5
	White	309	779	1	5.2	12.6	60.8	20.4
	Disabilities	60	725	20	35	21.7	23.3	0

Source

New Jersey Department of Education

Table VI. - PARCC SPRING 2017  
GRADE 5 MATHEMATICS

Elementary School	Race/Status Students	Valid Scores					Mean Scale Score					Expectations																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																			

Source

New Jersey Department of Education



Table VII. - PARCC 2017  
GRADE 8 MATHEMATICS

Middle School	Race/Status Students	Valid Scores	Mean Scale Score	Expectations				
				Not Yet Meeting	Partially Meeting	Approaching	Meeting	Exceeding
				Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5
				Percent				
Maplewood Middle	Black	81	717	35.8	22.2	24.7	17.3	0
	White	41	740	19.5	7.3	29.3	41.5	2.4
	Disabilities	28	700	64.3	21.4	7.1	7.1	0
	ALL	148	728	27.7	16.2	25.7	29.7	0.7
South Orange Middle	Black	55	712	34.5	36.4	20	9.1	0
	White	41	746	9.8	7.3	31.7	51.2	0
	Disabilities	27	719	22.2	48.1	18.5	11.1	0
	ALL	114	726	25.4	23.7	22.8	28.1	0

Source

New Jersey Department of Education

Table VIII. - PARCC SPRING 2017  
LANGUAGE ARTS - GRADE 8

Middle School	Race/Status Students	Valid Scores	Mean Scale Score					Expectations				
			Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5	Approaching	Meeting	Exceeding	Percent	
Maplewood Middle	Black	93	734	17.2	25.8	24.7	26.9	5.4				
	White	135	776	3	7.4	13.3	40.7	35.6				
	Disabilities	32	716	40.6	25	18.8	15.6	0				
	ALL	266	760	8.6	14.3	17.3	37.6	22.2				
South Orange Middle	Black	70	740	14.3	18.6	28.6	31.4	7.1				
	White	126	782	1.6	1.6	11.9	49.2	35.7				
	Disabilities	29	726	20.7	24.1	34.5	13.8	6.9				
	ALL	227	765	7	9.3	18.1	40.5	25.1				

Table IX. - PARCC SPRING 2017  
ALGEBRA I

School	Race/Status Students	Valid Scores	Mean Scale Score	Expectations				
				Not Yet Meeting	Partially Meeting	Approaching	Meeting	Exceeding
				Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5
						Percent		
Columbia High School	Black	168	725	15.5	32.1	36.3	16.1	0
	White	91	754	2.2	11	28.6	58.2	0
	Disabilities	67	717	19.4	44.8	26.9	9	0
	ALL	290	735	10.3	25.2	33.4	21	0
Maplewood Middle School	Black	14	764	0	14.3	0	85.7	0
	White	11	778	0	0	9.9	84.7	5.4
	Disabilities	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
	ALL	140	777	0	1.4	7.9	85	5.7
South Orange Middle School	Black	25	764	0	4	24	68	4
	White	88	775	0	3.4	4.5	80.7	11.4
	Disabilities	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
	ALL	145	774	0	2.8	7.6	77.9	11.7

Source

New Jersey Department of Education



Table X. - PARCC SPRING 2017

## ALGEBRA II

School	Race/Status Students	Valid Scores	Mean Scale Score	Expectations				
				Not Yet Meeting	Partially Meeting	Approaching	Meeting	Exceeding
				Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5
						Percent		
Columbia High School	Black	55	706	45.5	25.5	12.7	16.4	0
	White	112	769	2.7	6.3	8.9	76.8	5.4
	Disabilities	17	707	41.2	23.5	17.6	17.6	0
	ALL	189	749	16.9	13.2	9.5	56.6	3.7

Source

New Jersey Department of Education

Table XI - PARCC SPRING 2017

LANGUAGE ARTS - GRADE 9

School	Race/Status Students	Valid Scores	Mean Scale Score					Expectations				
			Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5	Not Yet Meeting	Partially Meeting	Approaching	Meeting	Exceeding
Columbia High School	Black	190	9.5	16.8	30.5	37.9	5.3					
	White	208	0.5	2.9	6.7	58.2	31.7					
	Disabilities	71	15.5	32.4	22.5	29.6	0					
	ALL	440	5.2	9.1	17	49.1	19.5					
			Percent									

Source

New Jersey Department of Education