



BLACK PARENTS WORKSHOP

Equity Now!

IN THIS ISSUE

A Time for Action

****IMPORTANT****
Board of Education Meeting
 Tuesday February 20, 2018 – 7:30 PM
 525 Academy Street
 Maplewood

For two decades, the South Orange-Maplewood School District has been engaged in practices that have resulted in gross racial disparities in academic achievement. African-American students have been denied access to advanced-level and Advanced Placement (AP) courses, and have been disproportionately disciplined compared to their White peers. This disparate treatment has resulted in lower African-American student achievement and has had a negative impact on their post-high school pathways. In addition, the South Orange-Maplewood School District has failed to recruit, hire and retain African-American teachers.

For these reasons, the school district came under review by the U.S. Department of Education (DOE) Office of Civil Rights (OCR) and was the subject of a federal civil rights complaint by the ACLU-NJ and the UCLA Civil Rights Project. In October 2014, the

South Orange-Maplewood School District voluntarily signed a Resolution Agreement with DOE-OCR, agreeing to remedy the policies and practices cited by OCR as possible violations of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

After three years, the Board of Education in October 2017, revealed data that indicated the racial disparities cited by OCR had not narrowed or closed, but in most instances, had widened. This data, combined with data from the state PARCC assessments, are shameful to the extent that it is proof of the South Orange-Maplewood School District's failure to take seriously the degree to which African-American students have been harmed.

The Black Parents Workshop has exhausted the regular avenues to seek redress for African-American students. We have also been frustrated by the Board of Education's failures. **As a result, the Black Parents Workshop will seek relief in court this week and seek judicial intervention to remedy the historical racial disparities in the South Orange-Maplewood public school district.**



Blake High School Visit

The Black Parents Workshop recently visited James Hubert Blake High School in Silver Spring, Maryland to get an inside look at a high school that promotes equity.

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South Hudson - Black Parents Workshop

We are launching the South Hudson – Black Parents Workshop representing parents and families in Hoboken, Jersey City and Bayonne.

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Seeing Equity Up Close

BLAKE HIGH SCHOOL VISIT

Some of the stellar students from the Minority Scholars Program at James Blake "Eubie" Blake High School in Silver Spring, Maryland.



Four years ago, the Black Parents Workshop traveled to Long Island, New York to visit South Side High School upon the invitation of then principal Dr. Carol Burris. We accepted the invitation because South Side High School and the Rockville Centre School District has gained a national reputation for ending tracking and closing the racial achievement gap.

For the same reason, we traveled this month to suburban Silver Spring in Montgomery County, Maryland to visit James Hubert "Eubie" Blake High School. An Arts & Humanities high school, Blake has a reputation for a strong academic program and improving access for African-American students to rigorous courses.

Joining the Black Parents Workshop on our visit was **Dr. Robert Jarvis** of the Center for Educational Leadership at the University of Pennsylvania Graduate School of Education. Dr. Jarvis is also the director of the Consortium for Excellence through Equity, a three-state network of school districts promoting equity in public education. Also joining us was **Dr. Aaron Graham**, former Assistant Superintendent of the Bergen County School District and currently director of the North Jersey Consortia for Excellence through Equity. Rounding out our team was **Ms. Courtney Wicks**, a parent from Hoboken who is leading the formation of the South Hudson (Hoboken, Bayonne and Jersey City) Black Parents Workshop.

We spent the day, under the hospitality of Blake High School principal Robert Sinclair, talking to students, visiting classes, meeting teachers and guidance counselors and touring the building.

One of the striking visuals of Blake High School is that a school of 1,700 students has relaxed rules that are imposed stringently at Columbia High School. Students are allowed to wear hats and hoodies, and we were told by two of the assistant principals that the dress code was relaxed because the administration recognized it had nothing to do with the students' performance in class. The same can be said with the use of cell phones. Though teachers have discretion in setting parameters for their use, the school encourages teachers to practice restraint in applying any restriction on their use.



What was also eye-opening was Blake High School's library. It is an inviting environment that opens at **6:40 every morning** for students. Blake's day begins at 7:40 am. The library also hosts a Homework Club on Tuesdays and Thursday after-school and school bus schedules are adjusted to make certain students can get home. The majority of Blake students are bussed to school.

We also witnessed Blake's singular lunch hour, when all 1,700 students have lunch. Students are allowed to lounge in the hallways during lunch and can use the time (one hour) to visit teachers to seek assistance.



During visits to class we saw engaged students and very diverse advanced-level classes. In one AP Biology class of thirty students, half were African-American and Latino, and the teacher was Muslim. In another Grade 12 English class, there were 6 or 7 special education students in a blended classroom and all the students were engaged in the lesson for the day.

The students from the Minority Scholars Program who met with us were all very focused, and spoke with excitement about the education they were receiving at Blake. The students were also very honest about their struggles in the most rigorous courses the school offers, but detailed the support they are given to be successful.



Guidance counselors shared the work that they do to encourage African-American enrollment in advanced-level courses. The school is in the final phase of completely de-tracking its curriculum; an undertaking that

has the full support of the Montgomery County School District. Guidance counselors hold individual meetings with 8th grade students to begin planning their course selection for Blake High School. They also meet with Blake students and engage in intensive outreach to parents.

A unique feature of the Montgomery County School District is that it mandates that an NAACP Parent Counselor is in every school, grades K-12. The counselor is a community volunteer who supports parents and interacts with building leadership. The NAACP Parent Counselor for Blake High School met with our delegation and spoke openly about her own son's experience at the school.

Montgomery County also mandates mandatory cultural competency and anti-bias training for every one of its 18,000 employees.

One of the things you immediately notice at Blake High School is the cleanliness of the high school. Janitors in the school are school district employees as the district does not out-source that function. The same is true of school security. What was striking was the manner in which students interacted with security guards and were clearly comfortable with their presence. Principal Sinclair told us that students trust their security guards and that school security oversees student-to-student mediation when there are conflicts.

Students at Blake High School are diverse by race and socio-economic status, but they are thoroughly integrated in the classroom.



Our trip to Blake High School was another opportunity to see what is possible when there is a commitment from the Board level down to make equity a priority and to provide access to African-American students to a high quality and rigorous curriculum.

SOUTH HUDSON – BLACK PARENTS WORKSHOP

Over the last several months we have been working with a parent organizer in Hoboken, Ms. Courtney Wicks, and have mutually agreed to establish the South Hudson – Black Parents Workshop. Our South Hudson affiliate will also include the communities of Jersey City and Bayonne. All three school districts face similar issues as the South Orange-Maplewood School District and African-American students in each district are underserved.

We anticipate making a formal announcement in the coming weeks and will be adding representatives from all three of these communities to our Board of Trustees.

PRINCIPAL SAMUELS UPDATE

We appreciate the outpouring of support for Marshall School principal Bonita Samuels. By her own choice, Ms. Samuels has accepted an assignment in the office of the Superintendent. She retains her principal title and has not vacated her position at Marshall Elementary School. The appointment of an "Acting" Principal signifies that the position has not been vacated by its current holder, Ms. Samuels.

The Black Parents Workshop expressed its outrage to SOMEA over the teachers' union's role in whipping up hysteria over the incident at Marshall School. We sent a formal letter to SOMEA and intend to communicate directly with the New Jersey Education Association (NJEA).

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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Our focus is on making certain African-American children receive their legally entitled education in public schools and are given access to high-quality and rigorous classes that will prepare them for college or a career. We believe that all students are capable of excellence and that closing the achievement gap is a matter of public will.

The work of the Black Parents Workshop includes educating parents on school district policy and state regulations, analyzing public policy, monitoring education trends, developing strategies for government intervention, and if necessary, seeking legal redress on behalf of African-American students and their families.

Our goal is to strengthen the ability of parents of African-American students to be effective advocates on behalf of their children. **We need your support!**

HELP US ADVOCATE FOR AFRICAN-AMERICAN STUDENTS

The sole focus of the Black Parents Workshop is to serve as an advocate on behalf of African-American students and their parents. Our work is focused on equity and justice for African-American children in public schools, grades K-12. We are a not-for-profit organization that receives no government funding. Our operations depend on the generous contributions of individuals that support equal opportunity and access to high-quality and rigorous classes for African American students.

HOW CAN I HELP?

You can write a check to the Black Parents Workshop in support of our work. In the memo section of the check write the name of our fiscal conduit: Sidewalk University. We can send you the Tax ID # so your contribution will be tax deductible. Mail the check to:

Black Parents Workshop
P.O. Box 762
Maplewood, NJ 07040

You can also visit the Black Parents Workshop website and make an electronic contribution through PayPal.

www.blackparentsworkshop.org