



Vocal A.C.T.I.O.N., LLC Consulting and Philanthropy

February 22, 2016

B.L.A.C.K. (Black Leaders Aspiring for Change and Knowledge) - Boston, MA
Boston Latin School

Update

Good Evening,

We would like to take the time to respond to the report released by the Office of Equity related to allegations of racial discrimination and hostility at BLS in violation of the Boston Public School Non-Discrimination Policy and statement. We appreciate the recommendations made by the Office of Equity and hope to be involved in the oversight of their implementation and the development of evaluation metrics for the recommendations once adopted by the Superintendent. We feel that these recommendations, along with the recommendations made by BLS B.L.A.C.K., will help to improve the racial climate at BLS.

Though we appreciate the recommendations as a first step, it is our opinion that the report did not take into account nearly enough impacted student voices. **Less than 10 students were represented in the investigation, which is less than 1% of the nearly 2,600 members of the BLS community;** interviews with such a small percentage does not reflect a complete assessment of the racial climate at BLS. Due to this poor representation and given that we provided information regarding incidences involving other students, the investigations and recommendations were too limited in scope. It is our hope to work with BLS and others to create a more comprehensive list of recommendations that we feel will help to address the totality of racial discrimination experienced at BLS.

In November of 2014, we presented Headmaster Mooney-Teta with a binder filled with racially offensive and insensitive tweets that were created, re-tweeted, and/or favorited by students at BLS and around the nation. **Not once was the racial insensitivity and impact that it had on students of color and the general student body at BLS addressed. The findings of this investigation prove that the administration was dismissive to the real issue of racial discrimination and harassment. As stated in the report, "There was no school wide intervention concerning race."** BLS has a history of an imbalanced racial climate. Alumni and other student testimonies and reports can testify to this. We did not go to Dr. Mooney-Teta to address cyberbullying as a whole, but to highlight and discuss the effects and concerns of racial discrimination within our school community that needed to be addressed. **Racial discrimination extends beyond tweets. It includes the micro-aggressions, in-person harassment, and the perpetuation of stereotypes that reflect institutional and generational racism. While we**

know this to be true and a part of our history, it does not have to be in our future and we hope that the headmaster and all other parties involved will work to ensure that.

The original tweets and other incidents reported by students (not mentioned in the Executive Summary released by the Office of Equity) were all in violation of the BPS Non-Discrimination and Zero Tolerance policies because the incidents have in fact contributed to, promoted, and resulted in a hostile or discriminatory environment (EQT-4) at BLS. The ineffective actions and dismissive nature of administration arguably have condoned racial discrimination. Dr. Mooney-Teta's lack of urgency has created a culture that devalues the dignity of students and creates an environment that "interferes with their freedom to learn or work." (EQT-5)

The Executive Summary also left us with many questions, including, but not limited to:

- Who has the authority to determine what tweets and incidents were "racially offensive" or insensitive?
- Why weren't all the students who were offended by the content of these tweets ever interviewed in the investigation process?
- During the investigation process we shared information about a specific incident in the school building when an adult used the n-word toward a student. Why wasn't that investigated?
- Why did the Headmaster fail follow up with the Central Office after the March 23rd correspondence?
- Will the students who are going to be directly affected by these recommendations be involved in the implementation of these recommendations?

This investigation is one of the many steps to reach our goal of creating a more racially inclusive and culturally responsive climate and culture at BLS. We want to:

- Ensure that students of color feel comfortable and accepted at Boston Latin School.
- Increase transparency between the administration and students.
- Demand an acknowledgment of racial tensions within the school.

Please see our goals below for in-school reform. Some goals are similar to those proposed by the Headmaster in her 6-point plan and Office of Equity, while others are a bit different and call for support from alumni and parents.

Goals

Immediate Goals

(1) **An apology** from the Headmaster. We would like the headmaster to acknowledge that there is racial tension at the school. We haven't heard much from her specifically acknowledging the racial discrimination students have experienced. She also owes it to parents who entrust their children every day in her care to apologize for her lack of urgency and ineffectiveness in initially addressing our concerns.

(2) **Reporting system that allows students to report incidents without having to report directly to a teacher.** The students would like direct access to administration through an online portal, similar to one created for faculty. Students have suggested that this mechanism be in the form of a mobile app, if possible.

(3) **Student and alumni involvement** in all cultural responsiveness efforts and recommendations proposed by the Headmaster and Office of Equity. The recommendations from the Office of Equity state that the students should "have fully contributed and reached consensus on these steps with Ms. Teta" in

order to move forward with the implementation of the plan. Students and alumni of color should be the meter of sufficiency for this plan. This is our school and our legacy.

(4) **A cultural respect code** that will outline the school's stance on racial diversity and inclusion and the consequences for infractions. This code would be signed by parents and students each year along with all other school-year documents.

We intentionally do not discuss disciplinary action of staff or students as this is not our responsibility. We instead are focused on in-school reform.

Long-term Goals

- (1) **Alumni of Color Mentoring Program-** during the Black History Program on the 27th, representatives from Vocal A.C.T.I.O.N., LLC will assist in collecting contact information for the alumni and parents database. We plan to test this out with 5-10 seniors in fall 2016 and implement for the 2017-2018 school year. We are asking for full support and resources from BLS/BLSA to ensure the success of this program.
- (2) **Expand the Praefect Program-** This program allows students to take on responsibilities within the school during study halls and after school. Freshman normally take on roles such as hall monitors, while upperclassman receive positions in the administrative offices and as teaching assistants. We feel that this will increase trust and transparency between students and faculty.
- (3) **Faculty Cultural Responsiveness/Students Support**
 - Representation and inclusion of alumni, parents, and students in implementation and evaluation of final plan proposed by the students, Headmaster, and Office of Equity.
 - Mandatory Cultural Proficiency Workshops and Series/Forums that will increase the dialogue and understanding related to racial issues.
 - Helping students foster relationships with faculty and external stakeholders to host engaging and informative workshops.
 - Expanding the Curriculum to include a class or series that will incorporate African history/African diaspora history. While funding a class is long-term, there is room for alternatives to be implemented next school year such as a "spring break educational trip," after school learning experiences, and possibly partnering with local colleges such as Simmons and Emmanuel Colleges.

If you have any further questions, please contact Rashanna Roach,
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