

JULY 27, 2020 PUBLIC COMMENTS LAKE WASHINGTON BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Inclusion/Equity

- **Rohinee Mattikalli**, EHS Student, rohineemattikalli@gmail.com

I am a student of Eastlake High School. I am emailing today to bring more attention to the issues of racism throughout our district. As a student whose race does not make me feel disrespected or undervalued in my place of education, it is extremely heartbreaking to see the black and other colored communities face these problems daily without interference from the district. This problem of racism within our school is often dismissed because it isn't physically seen, but it is profoundly felt in this environment of ignorance towards racism. In Eastlake High School in particular, without stating individual's names, there have been many incidents where privileged students have used racially offensive slurs or racially motivated hateful actions. This environment in schools, where it has become a normal event to use these hateful words and actions, is due to the complacency of our administration in dealing with these issues. I have never felt that I could report these problems to principals because they do not address these actions with clear consequences. Also, students who have repeatedly disrespected the black community are still representing our school through ASB and leadership roles, which endorses the idea these actions are harmless. Eastlake High School and other schools need to create change now. This includes clearly stating that these actions won't be tolerated with no exceptions and real consequences, creating a space for reporting problems with definite response from the administration, increasing representation of black students and staff at all district levels, and creating incident reports and publishing how LWSD is taking real action. It is necessary that LWSD takes immediate steps to address and stand up for equal treatment for the colored communities.

Thank you for your time.

I hope that this statement can bring some insight about the perspective of these problems from the experiences of a student. More importantly, I hope that serious action is taken after these meetings are held.

Thank you for this opportunity to use our voices for positive change.

- **Abby Hu**, s-ABHU@lwsd.org *{see attached letter}*

My name is Abby Hu and I'm a rising senior attending Eastlake High School.

I am disappointed that LWSD has not addressed the recent events of images and videos of LWSD students being blatantly racist and exuding unacceptable behavior. I am disappointed that LWSD has failed to address the racism that exists within LWSD, among the staff, teachers, and students.

As an Asian student, specifically East Asian, it is demoralizing to see staff turn blind eyes to overt racism. Since middle school, I have learned to suppress all my experiences because I cannot trust that an adult, a staff member, will be there for me, to support me, to lift my voice, and take action.

It hurts to want to take action when you see something that doesn't sit right with you, but cannot because there is no one to tell, no one who will listen and take action.

Why can you not help us? Is it because we are students of color? Is it because the aggressor is white and affluent? Are you uncomfortable? Is it because you are scared? Of backlash? Of parents?

What is stopping you from taking action?

I anticipate to see the following questions answered at future meetings:

- How will LWSD diversify their admins and staff? Expand training material?
- Is LWSD planning on hiring counselors of various backgrounds? All counselors at Eastlake HS are white.
- How will LWSD protect BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ students?
- How will LWSD reprimand unacceptable behavior? And no, telling a student "Don't say that again" is equivalent to a slap on the wrist; it does nothing.

I have attached a document with thoughts and experiences that students have anonymously submitted to me on racism and microaggressions in LWSD. I urge you all to read it in its entirety.

Thank you.

- **Crystal Visperas**, Teacher, EHS, cvisperas@lwsd.org
My name is Crystal Visperas and I am a 14th year teacher. This is my second year in LWSD. Thank you for genuinely listening to teachers and community members by reading survey results and public comments in regards to the racist Juanita mascot and announcing that we prioritize the lives of our students and teachers and staff members by starting next year as remote. These two issues are important and we still have more to tackle.

First, I implore the School District to make direct action in actively seeking out and hiring more teachers of color and teachers with varied identities in regards to LGTBQ+, different-abled bodies, religious affiliations and experience in teaching Brown and Black children. I am one of 2 teachers of color in my Humanities Department and I have been time and time again not listened to by my white colleagues or not taken seriously. This is demoralizing and hurtful, and if you want to attract and retain good teachers, educators must represent the reality of the world outside of LWSD. If we boast that our goals are to be anti-racist in our teaching practices, so must our hiring practices.

Secondly, my colleagues and I wrote a letter to the School Board and Dr. Stavem on June 1st to correct the community statement to include the word "Black" and proudly proclaim Black Lives Matter. A second communication was sent to Dr. Stavem in urging her to apologize for the grave mistake of not centering Black people's lived experiences and protection of their lives by the violent hands of police. We have not heard follow-up on how this was taken into serious consideration. Dr. Holmen, this is now on you. We have waited too long and we demand a response. The School Board and has not updated any resources since June 1st. This is a slap in the face to our Black students, teachers and community members and cheapens the statement made months ago. We ask that you apologize for not including the word BLACK in the first statement to the community and consistently update the LWSD website and social media with your learnings on anti-bias and anti-racist school practices.

Lastly, in the months of May and June, Gloria Henderson, your only Black administrator, emailed me several times, communicated with my colleagues, extended her support and advice, protested with other teachers in Redmond, and spent an hour and a half on a conference call with my students listening to their concerns and educating them on her experience as a Black educator. I absolutely commend Mrs. Henderson for all the effort and work she does behind the scenes of an **all-white School Board**. I demand her salary is increased for the 2020-2021 school year.

Return to School/Fall

- **Audrey Jones**, LWSD Student Services Teacher and Parent, audreyinsaza@gmail.com
I've been told that the district is seeking comments prior to the upcoming board meeting.

I've been making phone calls and sending emails since OSPI's original statement about all Washington State schools being open for in person schooling this fall. After my first wave of emails to representatives, I took out life insurance, and wrote out a will.

While we are all eager to get back to normal and return to school buildings, we cannot ignore the fact that we are in no position to open with our rate of community spread. Forcing students and staff to spend extended time in the classroom for in person instruction is a risk we cannot take. No amount of student and staff death is acceptable.

Many school districts have already announced an online only start in the fall. LWSD needs to follow suit. Teachers and staff worked tirelessly to provide distance learning in the spring, with just a few days' notice. We must stop squandering time and focus our energies on the reality we currently face. We have been dealt a difficult hand, but I know we will pull together for our learning communities again.

While I have hope that LWSD will listen to science and prioritize safety over our desire for normalcy, I also fear that those making the plans have little understanding of the actual functioning of our schools and classrooms. So far, little of what has been put forward seems to have a grasp on reality.

Teachers and staff need the support of our district to do our jobs to the best of our ability. We all want to return to normal, but to do that we have to continue the hard work of reducing community spread. We need time to prepare for the only viable option for the majority of our population, and plan for robust supports for our neediest students.

Thank you.

- **Veronica Nelson**, vjnpolis@gmail.com
I am a parent and educator in the LWSD. I support fully remote learning in the fall with live remote classes at least 4 days per week (e.g. Bellevue School District).

I'm happy to elaborate if you so desire.

- **Carissa Robinson**, parent, Helen Keller Elementary, carissa.e.robinson@gmail.com
Two weeks ago, I voted for a hybrid model. I have a second grader with significant support needs (learning center student fully included in general education) who NEEDS to be in school. I was fully in the camp that given the option, I would send him (and we have been fully isolated since March).

Transmission rates, listening to teachers, and my deep sense that school will all end up remote anyways changed my mind. I can and should keep him home, for everyone's safety (no, he will not wear a mask). Then I got the email saying he would lose his principal, special educator, service providers and be taken "out" of his home school and into a "remote" oversight school with new everything.

We have fought so hard and had so much success for his schooling... and his team is PHENOMENAL. We cannot afford losing that.

The position this puts families like mine in isn't right. We shouldn't be making a decision about keeping our child out of harms way based on losing all we have fought for in his IEP and the foundational team that has brought us there. My son is already considered one of the most marginalized student populations when it comes to being out of school... this compounds that effect.

With all of the districts around us heeding the advice of the King County Public Health, I plead with you to make this decision easy and (semi) equitable for families. Please start the year remote. It isn't safe for our teachers. It isn't safe for our families. It isn't ideal... but it's prudent and responsible.

I am planning on attending your virtual meeting tonight. I trust many of these issues will be addressed.

Thank you for your leadership. I can't imagine the time and energy you are investing in this role, and it's deeply needed.

- **Samantha Powers**, Preschool Special Education Teacher, spowers@lwsd.org
As a preschool special ed teacher in LWSD, I am gravely concerned for opening schools in-person in September. My students are highly impacted by their disabilities and require adult proximity. They sometimes mouth objects due to their developmental level and will have difficulty keeping a mask on due to sensory processing differences. We will not be able to social distance and will spend all day putting the staff members at risk while attempting to keep the students safe. Our classrooms are staffed with at least 3 teachers at all times and sometimes up to 6 or more. Data may show that children tend to spread COVID-19 and get sick at a lower rate, but I am concerned for the adults while also understanding we cannot do our job safely with less staff.

Safety procedures and protocols have not yet been announced. I am concerned that we will not be able to pull off sufficient disinfecting and sanitizing during the day. The same goes for temperature checks, symptom screening, and procedures if a student or staff member tests positive. How can I be expected to agree to return when these details have not yet been finalized?

I understand that online learning is not ideal for this population, but in-person school will also not be conducted to the same high quality and fidelity that we are accustomed to. One of our main priorities in preschool is to teach social skills such as sharing, taking turns, and interacting. Social distancing guidelines prohibit that. So instead we will be teaching students to stay away from each other and to not share, which could have negative long-term impacts on their social development.

As an educator with an auto-immune disorder, I am not yet comfortable risking my life to open school buildings at this time.

- **Kristen Jumper**, klmjumper@gmail.com

I wanted to add some thoughts to the discussion on whether students and staff in Lake Washington School District should return to school in person, prior to your board meeting on July 27.

As an educator and a parent of two students in LWSD, I understand what a difficult decision this is. We know that children learn best in the classroom environment, where they can interact with their peers and their teachers. I want nothing more than to be in the classroom with my students, and my own children yearn to be back with their own friends and teachers. Remote learning is not an ideal situation for most students, but, in this case, it is the only responsible solution for the start of the 2020-2021 school year. COVID cases continue to rise in King County and throughout Washington State. King County health officials released a report stating that socialization and work behaviors would need to decrease greatly in order for schools to reopen safely. This is not the behavior we are witnessing in King County. Researchers also stated that current transmission levels are too high for schools to reopen safely.

Neighboring districts such as Seattle, Northshore, and Bellevue have all stated that they will reopen with a fully remote learning model in September. For the safety and health of staff, students, families, and the greater community, I implore Lake Washington to make the same decision. The sooner this decision is made, the sooner teachers can plan for building their classroom community online and the sooner parents can make a plan for their families.

Thank you for your time.

Letter from Abby Hu, s-ABHU@lwsd.org

I have attached a document with thoughts and experiences that students have anonymously submitted to me on racism and microaggressions in LWSU.

1. I feel like making fun of others cultures in a "light-hearted" way has sorta become normalized in school ig [I guess], but it doesn't change the fact that it's not right.

One experience I had definitely wasn't ok and I wish I stood up more. It happened last year in algebra class, and my table group decided they wanted to play "who's most likely to"- most of the questions were alright, not the worst thing in the world, but it then gradually started to get worse, questions like:

"who's most likely to have a child with the name ching chong bing bong"

"who's house is most likely to smell like curry"

"who's most likely to be a terrorist"

Our table group was pretty diverse, and it just became so blatantly obvious certain questions were directed to certain people, I was so mad but it all seemed "light hearted" cuz sometimes pocs at the table would laugh too, idk, I felt horrible for the rest of the day

Another experience I had didn't exactly take place during school, but as I was walking home from school- there were 2 guys walking behind me and one of them was saying "walk faster" (which I'm still a little confused about because they could have literally walked past me and go ahead if they wanted to, but that's beside the point), I moved even farther to the side so they could walk ahead, and we were walking so that I was maybe 7 or 8 feet behind them, to the point where I could clearly hear what they were saying

One of the guys said to the other "hey have u ever had curry?" and the other guy was just like "no", (honestly I wasn't intently listening in on what they were saying), the conversation carried on and after a few seconds one of the guy starts to do an obnoxiously loud desi accent

2. Although this isn't the experience of a person of color, I think this incident is valuable in highlighting how our district treats cases regarding prejudice and racism. At the beginning of freshman year, students figured out that I am German. While most did not care, there a select few students who made remarks such as calling me "Adolf Hitler" spreading rumors I was a Nazi, or yelling "gas the jews" when I was standing with a Jewish friend of mine. These incidents deeply bothered me, so I went to talk to a teacher. She simply told me to act more "American" and that all this would go

away. For a few years this led me to essentially disavow my heritage and feel ashamed whenever I spoke my native tongue. Only until recently, I thought that to be an American I had to cover up and hide my origins. If I, a white man and US citizen, am treated this way, I can not fathom how my peers who are people of color are.

3. Not really a racial aggression but during the pledge of allegiance last year a bunch of white dudes would emphasize the "under god" part by saying it incredibly loudly. Then afterwards if people would say "god is fake then they would lash out and yell at the opposition to be quiet. My teacher then had a lesson after a while about free speech including time, place and manner yet they felt that was an excuse for them to do it more.
4. White dudes making jokes about Asian stereotypes, Asian fetishes etc. N-word.
5. My friend called me a terrorist as a joke 🙄👄🙄 (i'm muslim/arab)
6. During one of my classes, I just happen to cough a little into my elbow and the student either next to me or across I cannot remember as this was when we were still in school said to me, "Do you have the corona?". This isn't exactly what they said because again months ago. I didn't know how to respond and just laughed along. I felt uncomfortable speaking to the teacher about it but I should've spoken up. Hope this experience helps change how less views and teaches racism.
7. When racism against asians are so normalized where it's a regular occurrence to hear people say "well it's cuz [because] ur [you're] asian" when an asian gets an A and not cuz they studied hard.
8. The use of the N-word at eastlake [high school] along with the "fox eyes" trend on tiktok
9. When someone says that I shouldn't complain abt [about] the problems here [USA] bc [because] my parents came here from a "poor country"

10. u [you] don't need to share bc it's not really racist but i found it really interesting that instead of my asian half being made fun of, i was once called the daughter of hitler 🧠idk [I don't know] it was pretty rude and made me feel quite uncomfortable but it is not racism bc german is not a minority nor is it oppressed it was just an offensive statement!
11. One of my friends told me I smelled like curry in middle school all the time
12. Always having the least hardworking kids try to be my partner in group projects
13. i remember having lemon rice which was yellow and some kid went around yelling that it was Indian alien rice; i never brought it to school for years after. things like that- or having people think you're siblings with the only other indian kid in your class- there's so many things that are difficult to act upon
14. When people in AP World asked me if they can say the N-word because I'm part African. Somehow in their head they are allowed to say it because they know me. We weren't even friends so idek [I don't even know] why they would ask me that. They didnt just ask me once though, it was a repetitive experience. I don't identify as Black because I'm more North African and Middle Eastern so I don't say the word so I was shocked that they even considered asking me.
15. Though my class is always happen to have a large Indian population, a lot of them ate meat and I didn't because Hindu ideologies dictate that everything has a soul. When I was younger I found the smell unappealing and didn't want to touch it. Knowing this my classmates would make a habit of dangling their school lunches, with various types of meat, right in front of my face and sometimes put it in my lunchbox when I got up. I noticed that no other kid with dietary restrictions was ever treated this way, because our class had not been taught to accept different ideologies and to respect people's boundaries.
16. When our teachers told us to ask peers for help before asking them, I would try to ask the people around me but because I'm part of a model minority they never thought I truly needed the help. Eventually it became a habit to figure things out on my own, and when I didn't understand them I just left them alone because I was too scared to ask anybody anything. I had been so conditioned to think that all Asians

should be successful due to harmful stereotypes, that I felt like a failure every time I got something wrong. To this day it is extremely difficult for me to ask anybody questions.

17. At evergreen middle school one of the bus drivers would pull aside Indian girls and ask whether it was against our religion to wear deodorant because everybody smells like spices and curry and that it was disgusting. Another one of the bus drivers at the same school would force us to shut off any music that was in a foreign language, but when English music was played even louder it was fine. Once we played a rap song (It was completely clean, nothing inappropriate) and she told us "I don't want to hear no black music on this bus"

18. This one is pretty tame, but all throughout middle school and up until my sophomore year, people would unintentionally recognize me as other Indian students. I'm not even joking when I say almost every week someone walking down the hall would recognize me and yell something like, "Hey Raj! What's up?" The horrified look on people's faces when I would tell them they got the wrong Indian is still funny to me. People mistook me for other Indian students so frequently I had an entire speech memorized that I still use sometimes. Teachers also do this so often that it's a huge joke within the Indian community at Eastlake. I've also seen this with Asian students. Lawrence [redacted] is a pretty famous runner and in 9th grade PE, and the teacher was praising him for how good he was. Someone decided to yell "everyone dog pile Larry!" and the entire class proceeded to dog pile on Caden [redacted] since they didn't know the difference. Most of us just find it amusing but it can be pretty disheartening when the entire class literally does not know who you are.

Speaking of 9th grade PE, there was a kid in my class named Cmaeron. I forgot his last name, but apparently, he's since been expelled. Every day he would harass me and do really stereotypical Indian accents. He was one of those boys who would literally just shove you for no reason or try and suffocate you in your own hoodie. Anyway, one day after class I was in the library doing homework when he came in and started harassing me. I know racists aren't the most intelligent people, but this guy was literally so stupid he couldn't think of a single Indian food that he kept asking me "What do you Muslims even eat? Curry burritos?" I'm not Muslim and I don't know what a curry burrito is but none of the librarians seemed to care. In that PE class, I used to hang out with Shaun [redacted] and another kid who had just moved to the US from India a year prior. There was a group of white girls that would commonly mock us during football with racist Indian accents. None of us have Indian accents, even the guy who just moved here.

19. At my school, there's always that predominant group of kids sitting at the back of the bus. They're always really bothersome but we all just kinda ignore it. But one thing we can't ignore is how much they scream. In many occasions, they use the word curry or use an Indian accent -- a few of the times targeted to an Indian -- but I always found it offensive, as an Indian myself. Curry or an Indian accent doesn't define the culture India has. There's no reason to make fun of that. The more and they've used it, the more and more offensive it has become.
20. Okay so not really anything in particular but ever since I was a kid in elementary school and brought sushi to school people would say 'oh that smells so bad' Or 'your food is weird' and I became insecure about bringing any foreign food to school. I have since become desensitized to the jokes at my expense and other POC at our school. Even those who I thought were friends think it's funny to call me or other Asians 'Ling Ling' or 'Ching Chong' or anything of that sort. Most recently when COVID became a thing countless times people would say to me 'stay away, you have corona!!' As a 'joke'. As uncomfortable as I was I just felt like I had to laugh it off. I'm not even 100% asian and I have experience so many jokes about Math, food I eat, being 'yellow' coronavirus, and so much more that I've just become accustomed to. I can't imagine how other minorities feel that are 100% asian or POC.

Another thing is that I am not 100% sure about my sexuality. But because I don't dress like a typical girl I guess people have called me lesbian as an insult since I was in middle school. This is so detrimental to the LGBTQ+ community, using 'gay' and 'lesbian' as insults or something to be ashamed of. I cannot count the amount of times I have been called lesbian or people have said to me 'when you come out just know that I was right about you' or 'stop pretending to like guys' or anything of that sort.

21. Teachers and peers mistaking other people of color for each other is SUPER PREVALENT. I've had the wrong papers continuously be passed to me, even after clarification. A substitute filling in for a teacher on paternity leave always called me the wrong name to the point where the guy next to me was like "just call her Sally" and the name she was calling me was of another Indian girl, which I did not respond to. She literally was snapping her fingers trying to get my attention. I told her, I'm not [that girl's name] and she still couldn't figure out who I was. I had that teacher for about 2-3 months.

22. People say the f slur and t slur all the time, and are especially homophobic towards guys so I'm lucky. People are explicitly transphobic, refuse to acknowledge they/them pronouns or even normal binary pronouns. They laugh when people introduce themselves with pronouns too.

There hasn't been any violence targeted at me, but it can feel very insensitive sometimes. There was a time I wanted to explore the pronouns they and them but I couldn't because of the amount of backlash I would get. I do prefer them even now but I can't put it anywhere. A few teachers at our school are honestly the best about it, they ask for pronouns and are definitely allies. Ms.Rohn is a real one


23. Last year in ninth grade humanities we did a unit where gender and sexuality came up and it was SO bad afterwards. People were using various sexualities in an insulting way, making fun of people who identified as those things, etc. On the trans day of visibility they decided to pretend to be allies and go up to the pride club, they were passing out there ribbons I think, and would laugh when they got back

24. Not blatant homophobia, but I've experienced people who don't understand sexualities and sometimes make weird and incorrect assumptions

25. i don't have specifics really but i've heard so many people just make "jokes" about being gay or lgbtq+, and making being a part of the community seem like it's a bad thing or something to be looked down upon, i've heard some people try and justify it by saying it's "dark humor"

26. It was the last day of school (thank god) and we were presenting our skits that we wrote in our 6th grade i-Experience drama class at Inglewood. A group of boys (all white) went up to perform their skit and it was very insensitive. In their skit, they wore a, pretended they were Latinx, used a stereotypical accent, pretended they were housekeepers, but that's not it. They also pretended to be Chinese and used stereotypical accents while saying very insensitive racist remarks. Some of these boys had said racist things to me before. I look back at the teacher, expecting him to do something, but he's just thumbing through some papers. In my head, I was like "Are you serious?" I was so angered and disappointed that when the boys were done with their skit, I told them it was racist and not funny. Only one of the five boys apologized. The teacher did nothing, not even once I spoke up. I feel disgusted that I

had not spoken up to previous experiences with them, even until this day I feel so disgusted with myself.

27. me not personally bc i do be in the  but i have heard a lot of homophobic remarks especially freshman year when we would sit next to the gsa [gay straight alliance] kids and it made me really uncomfortable bc it made me feel like theres no way i'd be able to come out of the closet if people would act like this/treat me like that.

the way people would be extra rude if one of those kids did smth [something] wrong just bc [because] they were gay and 'looked gay' and if i remember correctly i think they may have used the f slur in a gc [group chat].honestly i wish i could be more specific but i honestly tried to ignore it at that point bc i was struggling and that made me feel even worse and i also don't want to be too specific and call out specific people and get outed somehow