

General Comments, Statements & Questions

A former Holmen High School student recently made a post about the racism she experienced in her time there. Her words greatly inspired me to reflect on my own experience in the La Crosse School District.

- In first grade a substitute teacher pulled me up to the front of the class to announce how crazy my hair was, and that it looked like a rat's nest. This was in front of every single student. I still don't know why he did that.
- In 6th grade people would put things in my hair.
- I was constantly made to sit in the back of the classroom because my hair was too big.
- My 7th grade teacher told me she couldn't wait to see me when I was older, so she could say, "Yes, I want fries with that." She also constantly told me how bad of a student/child I was and put me into a group she called the "bad kids." (It makes me sick to my stomach even thinking of talking to a child like that).
- In that same class, a White boy told me to "go pick cotton." That same teacher did nothing.
- In 7th grade a substitute teacher told me that "people of my culture always came up with the strangest names."
- In 8th grade my first "boyfriend" was White and his friends told him he was gross/weird for dating a Black girl.
- In 8th grade I was sent to the Principal by a White teacher for using the word "Black" instead of African-American.
- People constantly told me I was "pretty for a black girl."
- My little sister is Hmong and she found a pair of Lady Raider's Basketball Club sweatpants in the Lost & Found. It said LRBC on the butt. The principal asked her if it was a gang.
- At Central the lunch room and school games were embarrassingly segregated. It was almost like there were clear and distinct lines for where the White kids sat, the Hmong kids sat, and the Black kids sat.
- My junior year of high school a boy in my class told me I looked like a monkey. He also made fun of the fact that my father was dead, claiming he died in a gang fight. (He did not).
- I ended up relaxing (permanently straightening) my hair for 7 years. A white girl put her hands in my hair trying to prove it wasn't real hair.
- We were constantly stared at at dances and asked "Can you teach me how to twerk?"—but were never invited to hang out.
- My sophomore year I took a Theater class and the teacher pulled me and another Black student aside to make sure we knew we would be studying "literature" and not "movies."
- A group of my friends and I were all laughing really loudly (all black girls). I heard a White girl passing by ask her friend if we were about to start fist-fighting.
- Two girls got into a fight during lunch one day. In my class afterwards some students were joking about it. "Who was the fight between?" "I don't know, some ghetto Black girls." One of the girls in the fight was actually White.
- I was constantly mixed up with other Black students in the school, despite not looking anything like them.
- At a friend's party, one of the parents asked "who invited all of the black people?" There were only two Black people, and I was one of them.
- I and other Black students were constantly singled out or isolated in class when it came to topics on race. (Although I understand we have a unique perspective this is incredibly uncomfortable as both a child but the ONLY one in the room, knowing you don't have a support system).
- When reading "A Raisin in the Sun" as a class nonblack students were encouraged to use "black accents," and a Hmong student commented how "cool" it was that she got to speak "ghetto."

- We were taught that The Black Panther Party was a terrorist organization. (I knew they weren't).
- I and many others were frequently called Niggers.
- Confederate flags were flown frequently.
- I brought complaints about Confederate flags to the Principal and he told me there wasn't much he could do because they had "freedom of speech." (This is not true. You do not have freedom of speech in schools—you must adhere first and foremost to the school's rules). That same Principal later tried to discourage me from starting the Feminist club because, and I quote, "Aren't feminists kind of...angry and hate men?"
- My senior year my principal seemed to use me as a pawn when it came to discussions on race as I was randomly and unexpectedly thrown in to meetings about planning Diversity Day and other diversity events.
- Diversity Day was used as a showcase for various school clubs to show pride in their work. It was also a day that I remember being very important to students of color, and it was also a day that many students skipped. In one of the Diversity Day meetings we were trying to come up with ways to boost meaning and my White peers threw out ideas like "bouncy house"—as if that will help us tackle diversity and equity.

I am 22 years old. Some of my earliest memories with racism are at the age of 6. This list consists only of things that I *remember* and even know about. That goes to show you how traumatizing, life-changing and impactful it is. These are things that will always stick with me and dictate my childhood experience. While my White peers look back on high school, they remember football games and smoking behind the school. When I look back I remember the times I was called a Nigger.

I've been wanting to say these things for years because growing up as a student of color in the La Crosse School District was hell. These experiences made me angry and distant to my peers for years. But as an adult entering the Education field I am no longer angry, bitter, or resentful. But I ask those of La Crosse County to do better. Do better so that the little brown boys and girls who come after me will never have to experience the things that I did.

I was at a meeting of yours back in January when my friend Nate Coleman was presenting. I just wanted to say that I appreciate the work that your board is doing in La Crosse right now. As a 1992 UWL alum, I know that taking these issues on in a community like La Crosse is not easy. I work in the equity field and I spend a lot of energy trying to get clients to push the envelope like you all are doing now. La Crosse is my second home. I never thought it would be as diverse as it is now and I'm glad to see you all stepping up the way you are. These kids desperately need advocates. Thank you.

I thank you for taking the time to evaluate the SRO's being in the schools in the school district, and appreciate that a committee could be formed to further evaluate and gather the necessary information in order to make an informed decision on the matter, and the money that the School District of La Crosse is spending.

Here are a few things, that I hope will be considered and/or discussed in the matter at hand:

- With the data showing more black students are being suspended, 1) How many of these are involving the SRO's suspending the students? Isn't it the Principal or Associate Principal that is suspending them? 2) How many of those being suspended are repeat offenders? I just mention that to make sure the data looked at is not skewed & not being counted as different

individuals...there are enough problems with stereotypes of black people, without adding more unnecessary negative feelings. 3) Are the suspensions being looked at from every school, including the charter schools?

- Do we need to look at any potential favoritism that teachers or staff may be showing on dealing with behaviors? There are many white students who are troubled, living with extreme amounts of trauma, starting fights, etc. as well as black students. This could also skew the data. Some staff & teachers may not even be aware, if there is any favoritism being shown (including to the "top notch" students vs. those who don't try their best, not wanting to be challenged, or otherwise).
- Will the SRO's be spoken with, or the families, both white & black that have a lot of interactions with them? Many times, I have seen the SRO's genuinely taking time to meet with families & set up plans to help work through things.
- Does the school district need to look further in being more consistent with discipline of students & following the district policies? There are many differences & discrepancies among the schools in the district
- Will there, in fact, be more social workers & counselors hired in the district to be of help to students? They are completely overwhelmed many times with the amount of students that need them, within the school day - and the social workers & counselors have families & cannot be working all hours of the day, neglecting their families
- Will the committee be able to spend time in the schools for an afternoon or a full morning to see what relationships are being built, or to see what the SRO's are doing during the school day? Can they evaluate to find what the root of the problem is?

I ask for these considerations, because there are good students, staff, & teachers of white, black, brown, etc. There are also the "bad eggs" of the above that wish to cause trouble or don't get the attention or support they need that are white, black, brown, etc. This has been the case for longer than I have been alive, prior to SRO's being in schools. We can't expect that the SRO's are going to be wherever a fight breaks out, if nobody knows it is going down.

Again, thank you for all you are doing. The concerns I listed are probably many things that you have thought of as well. This is a very difficult and challenging decision that needs to be made for the 2021-2022 school year, especially with the added stress & problems going on in our country & around the world currently (COVID-19, racism, mental health issues, etc.)

I want to formally voice my support for forming a committee to investigate the contract the La Crosse School District has with the police department to provide a police presence in the schools. I think it is important to do research, ask tough questions and find out if this service is best serving the needs of students and families in La Crosse. The findings may be that this presence is critical or that the money could be better spent on other kinds of programs. Or, perhaps a hybrid model would be a good way to move forward.

- I 100% feel that all students should feel comfortable in schools, although the reality is, no matter what decision is made, there will be some that feel uncomfortable - a no-win

situation. With all that 2020 has been, there is more unrest being brought up, & more injustices. It is important that we do put more emphasis on the different cultures of the minority students (black, Hmong, Asian, Indigenous, etc - I wish to include all, as they are all valued). Each ethnicity has done positive & important things to our country, our state, & our community. It is only fair & justified to further educate for all & appreciate different cultures, as the Foreign Language classes provide for the students who take those classes.

- All sides should be heard when there are concerns and/or questions. There are not many parents, community members, school board members, & Hogan staff that have the opportunity to take time when students are in class, face-to-face, to see how a school days works. To spend a fair amount of time sitting in a class, seeing the hallways between classes, & in any commons area or cafeteria, would give people insight to what goes on in a typical day - unrealistic to expect or request people to do, especially under the pandemic, when we are able to return face-to-face.
- There are many dynamics within families, & many families who are not in stable environments, who have many health & mental health issues, & are not always familiar with resources available, or sometimes too proud to utilize their services. In other words, many things that we cannot control outside of school, but things that still need to be recognized as far as expectations & accountability in school, so that the teachers & staff can teach the curriculum, along with what responsibilities are to be carried by the student.
- As a result of some unfortunate circumstances & unmet needs, there are many behaviors that are shown & students aren't mature enough to fully understand what is going on or what their needs may be. As much as ACE's are talked about, as well as Informed Trauma Care, the reality is that school districts do not have the budgets to fully follow what is required to meet all the aspects of Informed Trauma Care. That is a reality. What I am so concerned about also, is that Informed Trauma Care includes holding one accountable for their actions, & getting down to the reason behind the actions, which takes both time & people. How can we continue to talk about this, when we cannot act on every aspect of it?
- 2 1/2 years ago, I spoke to the School Board in regards to needing more guidance counselors &/or social workers due to the sad reality of the behaviors that were happening. These behaviors continue to happen, with my children & I seeing it with white, black, & bown students. Many agreed that more people are needed, but there is no money. I understand the need to increase the technology available for all students, but can the budget be evaluated to increase human connection with students? If we have learned anything during this pandemic, we have learned that people need face-to-face interactions with people. Those with mental health issues can wait as long as 6 months to get in for their initial visit with a therapist - that is real, meaning that especially now, with the increase of mental health problems, many are on their own, waiting to see someone who is educated in the proper manner to help them.
- If the SRO's are taken out, what are the repercussions if & when a significant/violent situation were to present itself? I honestly wonder that, knowing that many situations that have happened in the US, in other schools, have been a result of a white person's actions.
- I do not want to discount or disregard any student's or staff's fears of having or seeing an SRO in school, black, white, brown, indigenous, or otherwise. I also am concerned with the health & safety of all in the school district & community. Our society is severely impacted

due to all the negativity that has occurred over decades, and then this year, with everything being magnetized.

- If the SRO's are no longer handing out truancy tickets, and their role has been changed, couldn't that be further discussed to fit the needs of the school district as well? Would it be of value, to see if the contract could be set for 1 year, so there could be a more complete evaluation of how the SRO's are doing, when the students are face-to-face, when board members & Hogan Administration could take the time to be in the schools and observe how things go on in a typical day? Could the district better inform the schools & parents of what the SRO's role is? (Many have assumed that SRO's hand out suspensions & decide who gets truancy tickets. They don't know that truancy tickets are given out due to the attendance & lack thereof.) This decision is having to be made at such a bad time, when our country is in such divide over so many things.
 - I may be one of the few, but my husband & I are both in 100% agreement that if any of our children disregard the school district policies and are acting in a way that is inappropriate, they should be held accountable & deal with the consequences. If they do something wrong, I hope they are called on it & learn from it.
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