

Changing How Schools Deal With Racism

The idiom “Monkey see, Monkey do” is often used when describing the nature of racism in children and teenagers around the country. Ignorance and racist ideas stem from the community that surrounds the child which does not only include parental figures; the educational community shares responsibility for the development of children as well. After affluent white schools experience a scandal involving racism, administrators typically claim they feel terrible and will try their best to “do better” to prevent another incident like this again. But, what really happens? Often times, very little. *The New York Times* article, “A New Generation of Racism Is Seen” states that “racial intolerance among young adults” is becoming a growing trend. This observation was made in 1989 and it's disappointing that it continues to hold true in schools today. This proves that not enough is being done to stem the issue of racism in our schools. Schools need to reevaluate the way that racist actions are dealt with in order to properly combat the continual racism that is seen across America.

The Mahtomedi School District in suburban Minnesota is a prime example of how racism often continues to be tolerated. As with the majority of school districts, Mahtomedi wants what is best for its students. But in a school where ninety-one percent of students are white and there are few to no staff of color, problems surrounding racism become harder to solve. Too often, the primary focus becomes moving forward, which frequently leads to ignoring the affected parties. When racist insults were made at a girls soccer game in September of 2019, Mahtomedi chose a thirty-minute assembly in which a few staff members spoke about how “we do not condone such behavior” and “racism is not okay.” Students then left, and the issue was left with no follow up from students or staff. When an administration chooses to simply acknowledge the racism

without time for students to consider the event, many maintain the notion that the problem truly was “no big deal.”

Those living in school districts like Mahtomedi may argue that the schools are doing enough to combat racism by following the unwritten guideline of many primarily white schools, simply cover it up until it becomes necessary to address it. Often, schools don't try to cause damage to their communities by allowing racism to flourish, however when an administration attempts to move on too quickly from racism it can do an incredible amount of long term damage to the school community as a whole. Mahtomedi isn't doing anything drastically wrong, but they're trying to move on too quickly, like so many schools and situations throughout the country. The fact of the matter is that schools that see racism and only make a minimal effort to address the single issue continue to see it until the issue is dealt with completely. Communities need to keep the idea in mind that if racism is seen from one group of students, it cannot be isolated to a single incident. Simply addressing the problem at hand with a statement or an assembly is not only detrimental towards the students and their paradigms of racism, but also to the severity and extent of the overall issue of prejudice and discrimination in the community.

“A Letter from the Birmingham Jail” by Martin Luther King Jr. emphasizes that white moderacy is the greatest threat to eliminating racism. King wrote about how those who stand by and look for an indirect approach that places order above justice threaten efforts to eliminate discrimination more than those who use violence. Martin Luther King Jr. would advocate for a more direct approach than what is currently being seen from schools across the US. Many school districts today would be considered an incredible threat to King's dream due to their inaction against discrimination. School districts must teach this concept in order to eliminate

systematic disenfranchisement because the roots of society can be found in the education system. Society cannot hope to stop racism until open conversations happen on a school, community and national level.

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