

Widening the Lens

The Far Brook School Diversity Conference

ALUMNI CONSTITUENT GROUP CONVERSATION STARTERS

QUOTES FOR DISCUSSION

"Since the wider sense of community for all students and adults is compromised when racism is left unexamined, conversations on race and racism should be held across and among the various constituencies in the school community. Talking about race and racism is not something only black people and other people of color should do. While interracial dialogue that directly addresses race, racism, and privilege may be difficult to engage in, it is necessary that these conversations take place."

- Edith G. Arrington, Diane M. Hall, and Howard C. Stevenson
"The Success of African American Students in Independent Schools"

"Ankita Ajith can recall learning about slavery, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Rosa Parks at her Katy, Texas, elementary school in the Houston area.

But looking back, Ajith, now a student at Northwestern University, also vividly remembers how superficial those conversations were, and how much she wishes that her predominantly white, suburban school district had given her the tools from a young age to understand America's racist past and its connection with the present.

"They taught us things that were easily digestible and sounded good," Ajith said. "It was definitely painted in the light that 'these problems are in the past,' and 'America is the land of the free' and 'everyone is equal here.'"

In July, Ajith and three of her friends [testified](#) before the Texas State Board of Education, [demanding changes](#) to the way students are taught. They are advocating for core curriculum changes in social studies — specifically American history — classes. The college students pressed the board to acknowledge the state's "deeply anti-Black, racist past as well as the oppression that continues today." To them, educators should teach significant topics like the 1950s and 1960s civil rights movement with more depth and breadth. They believe that kids, no matter what grade they are in, should learn history through an antiracist lens, not only learning about the role of white supremacy and racism in history, but doing so in a way that empowers them to pursue social justice."

- Aaricka Washington, *The Hechinger Report*
"How Do you teach antiracism to the youngest students?"

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"I once read a quote: Guests are not family, whose foibles and mistakes are tolerated. On the contrary, guests must follow the family's wishes without question, keep out of certain rooms in the house, and always be on their best behavior...Guests have no history in the house they occupy. There are no photographs on the walls that reflect their image. Their paraphernalia, paintings, scents and sounds do not appear in the house.

...Having no history in the house used to mean not seeing faculty members that look like me, seeing only white faces on the wall, or reading and studying subjects that did not reflect my experience. In general, being a guest meant that I was allowed to be at [the school], but that was only if I was quiet."

- Frank Tuitt
Excerpt from "Staying in the Guest House"

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#Blackat INSTAGRAM POSTS

I'm a white alum who took Black liberation as an elective while at [the school]. I have to credit the Black students in the class for teaching me more about the realities of racism during that semester than I had ever been taught/cared to learn on my own previously. It shouldn't have fallen on them to teach their oppression to white people.

#BlackStudentsAsTeachers

I graduated [the school] in 2013. The one time I attempted to go back to visit, the front desk thought I was "trespassing" and didn't believe me to be an alum. They were prepared to call police. I haven't been back since, and I've cut almost every tie I have with [the school].

#belonging

I will never forget having the police called on me for giving a tour of the school to my nephew (who was accepted to the school) and my college friend, all of us Black. I was very proud of my school and excited to show it off, and was instead bum rushed by police officers at the school I had attended for years.

#belonging

"I cannot thank the security maintenance staff, and kitchen staff enough. THEY were our family. Thank you SO MUCH for giving us a space to have our voices heard and share in the pain of all of this together. I've never felt more connected to the people at this school."

#FindingCommunity

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QUESTIONS

Question 1: Did you feel a true sense of belonging in your school?

Question 2: Did you experience or know of racial incidents? If so, were you satisfied with how they were handled at your school? Were there consequences for those involved. Were there learning opportunities?

Question 3: Was there silence around race, or was it discussed openly?

Question 4: In your experience, was history taught in a way that accurately represented the role of race in America? If not, were you aware that it was an incomplete history?

Question 5: Are you aware of efforts being made to provide students with the information and tools necessary to understand America's story of racism and therefore understand the dynamics of race in America today?

Question 6: What do you feel Alumni can do to help shape the institutional priorities of independent schools?

Questions 7: What do you feel Alumni can do to enlighten the administration of any negative impressions and experiences that inhibit a stronger ongoing connection to the school?

Question 8: What can schools do to repair relationships or foster greater connections with alumni of color?