

To the Parents Association,

A lot has changed recently at ██████ Academy. It has happened very quickly. And while there have been many small conversations, I am sure, there has been no collective, community-wide discussion about the future of the institution that we all love and are invested in. Some of these large-scale changes have been unavoidable. Our response to the Covid-19 situation was, out of necessity, quick and sweeping. We have, however, done as well as could be expected in maintaining as much continuity and in-person instruction as possible. In comparison to public school districts in our own region and around the country, we are certainly fortunate¹.

The pandemic changes, though, have masked² larger and perhaps more consequential transformations that merit debates which have not taken place to date. Critical race theory, as advocated by the National Association of Independent Schools, has been adopted without scrutiny and under the guise of diversity. The “Affinity Spaces”, implemented in the upper school, segregate students on the basis of race and “identity”. While presented to parents and faculty as a seemingly harmless “windows and mirrors” approach, with which almost no one disagrees, the reality in practice has been the promotion of increasingly radical activism amongst the student body. This has taken place without any meaningful discussion as a full faculty. There has been no opportunity provided for dissent, or even to provide input or feedback³.

¹ It still galls me that my four-year-old has to wear a mask to play outside on the playground - an unscientific, unnecessary, over-reaction - but I digress...

² Purposeful English Teacher Pun

³ This is not without precedent. It seems rather a feature of the current decision making processes. When it was suggested, in the immediate aftermath of the pandemic closure, that we reexamine the gendered language of our graduation awards, assurances were made that feedback would be sought from all parties - parents, alumni, faculty, etc. As a member of each of those constituencies, I thought that my opinion would be appreciated as a part of the conversation. While I spent considerable time and effort drafting and crafting the language I would use to express my position, it was never even heard. I asked multiple members of the task force how to submit feedback, in writing, only to discover that the text of the new language had already been decided upon. That letter can be found [here](#).

I do not write under the illusion that everyone will agree with me - that is not the point. I only wish to express a few brief opinions for the purpose of sparking substantive conversation about the direction our school is taking. Perhaps the conversation will be had and we will ultimately decide to continue on the current path. That would be fine. My concern is only that a true dialogue actually be given the space to develop⁴. As such, my feelings are as follows:

#1 - ██████ Academy is not a racist institution.

In the 30 years that I have been affiliated with ██████ Academy, I can honestly say that I have never witnessed anything but unqualified love and support for *all* students, regardless of color, creed, or identity. Our long history, since 18████, reflects a progressive and tolerant atmosphere. Proponents of critical race theory see systemic racism and white supremacy wherever they look. I reject the premise, based on experience, that ██████ Academy is a racist place. Families choosing to send their children to our school should be assured that their children will feel a sense of belonging, be accepted and celebrated, and be treated absolutely equally. The affinity spaces approach suggests the opposite - that minority students need a place of safety in which to process the harms visited upon them by the institution, to which they are implicitly unwelcome. This simply is not true of ██████ Academy, either in the past or today⁵.

#2 - The NAIS should not be determining ██████ Academy's decisions.

This national organization is not representative of the concerns specific to our school. We are not Exeter or Choate. We never have been and do not aim to be an elite, exclusive, bastion of privilege. I'm pretty sure that we still teach our little ones that "*Just because everyone else is doing it...*" is not a sufficient excuse for following down the wrong path. Our school is lucky enough to already have the kind of diversity of which other schools are jealous. We also already have a remarkable spirit of unity, family⁶, and togetherness. What is the point of being

⁴ In my professional experience, bureaucracies frequently purport to host "difficult discussions", and then proceed to not have them at all.

⁵ It saddens me to say that we have arrived at the point where a "whites only" faculty group exists at ██████ Academy, yet [here we are](#).

⁶ Replacing school families with affinity spaces neatly accomplishes the goal of "disrupting the Western-prescribed nuclear family structure requirement", as [this BLM lesson plan](#) puts it.

an *independent* school if we can't make our own decisions? The affinity space model, based upon critical race theory, encourages division rather than unity. It suggests that our students should see themselves primarily as group members rather than individuals, places their immutable characteristics as top priorities rather than their unique, individual talents, and encourages them to view one another as pawns engaged in systemic power struggles rather than children experiencing an egalitarian education⁷.

#3 - The chief aim of K-12 education should be enlightenment, not activism.

Part of the disturbing trend in prioritizing critical race theory over traditional educational models is the insistence upon teaching activism instead of content. Childhood education should ideally be about building a foundation. The NAIS approach, on the other hand, seems obsessed with creating students ready to tear down the foundations of their own nation, history, and schools themselves. If “silence is violence”, then every student is forced to mouth the correct slogans in order to prove to the adults in control of the struggle sessions⁸ that they have adequately absorbed the proscribed bromides. Our upper school stands at a particularly precarious moment in this regard. Our history department is losing not only Mr.

⁷ Consider this personal anecdote from the NAIS Conference in Philadelphia: Approaching the end of a mostly boring presentation on diversity, the professor told her audience, “You need to hire more black teachers.” There was, of course, universal agreement. She followed it up, however, by saying, “But they need to be *the right kind* (*emphasis both mine and hers*). Not like *Clarence Thomas* or *Ben Carson*.” So, no independent school should consider the first pediatric [neurosurgeon](#) to separate conjoined twins at the head, or the currently seated Supreme Court [justice](#) who has authored more opinions than any other, as qualified to teach in a private school setting because they are the *wrong kind* of black. Got it... The white administrators, of course, laughed and clapped like trained seals.

⁸ Having been involved in enough of these by now, I have no problem calling them as such. If a school official tries to claim that students are not being taught “what” to think but instead “how”, they are lying. Every one of these “dialogues”, “meetings”, and “spaces” creates environments in which it is all but impossible (even for a fully formed, opinionated adult) to feel empowered to express any nuance or dissent. Our Columbus Day “discussion” comes to mind. After “learning” that Columbus was nothing more than a genocidal slavemonger, the only student commentary that entered the vacuum was, “My family is Italian, but we don't believe in slavery or anything like that...”. It was, frankly, more productive than the day the kids were told that listening to Bruno Mars is “cultural appropriation”.

██████████⁹ but also ██████████. I worry, and I think parents should rightly worry, that perhaps the most important bulwark against rewriting our collective past will soon be under the type of ideological assault that we've seen in other departments¹⁰. The Student Government has already been egged on to agitate for specific titles¹¹, anti-American and revisionist curriculum choices are being actively contemplated, and there can be no reason to expect that new hires will be evaluated on anything more than a box-checking, get-with-the-program basis. If scholarship, historical accuracy, and patriotism are all deemed elements of white supremacy, why would we seek new history teachers who display any of those qualities? Or, differently put, why would an institution actively seek to undermine its own history, drive away half of its customer base, and totally transform itself¹² in the service of an educational fad like critical race theory? These questions haven't even been asked, let alone debated. Even in the relatively short five years that I have been teaching in the upper school here, it appears that the knowledge base young people are bringing into my classroom has drastically shifted. The children know less about themselves, their history, and the world, yet are angrier and more certain that the structures around them (our school, the United States, their elders, their families, their non-woke teachers, etc.) are only empowered to deny them of the true knowledge that they have been aggrieved by those very structures.

#4 - The implementation of critical race theory is not developmentally appropriate.

Children do not have fixed “identities” yet. They are constantly changing, evolving, and growing. They try on and shed identities as they navigate the world. They also don't know

⁹ Much can and should be said in praise of Mr. ██████████. He was my history teacher. A scholar of the Civil War, ██████████ wrote books on the role of African American Union divisions. It is truly unfortunate that in this moment, that cries out for an expert voice in American History, his time of well earned retirement has arrived and he has totally walked back everything he ever stood for.

¹⁰ No department is safe in this [milieu](#).

¹¹ I feel like I'm 20 again, hearing [Howard Zinn](#) dragged out of the dustbin...

¹² An important point, which merits its own specific treatment, is the debt we owe to the ██████████ family's philanthropic contributions. ██████████ gifted our school with a transformative financial contribution based upon a vision of a unique educational environment. It prioritized a commitment to nature - Rocks, Roots, and Wings, the ██████████ River - and a quasi-Great Books approach with Latin for every student, dedication to free speech and an emphasis on sending leaders out into the world, etc. **Question** - if the school does a 180 and throws those values overboard, does it deserve to wield the millions it was given as if nothing happened? If it caves to pressures and becomes indistinguishable from other schools, did it pull a bait-and-switch game? *Maybe we should ask the ██████████ family...*

things yet. They have to learn, and be taught the basics first¹³. Instead, graduate school is being visited upon the youngest of our children. Before they can spell intersectionality¹⁴, it is being foisted upon their classrooms. The children of ██████ Academy, ages 3-18, should be treated in an age-appropriate manner, not as experimental subjects for the angry, mostly childless perpetual-grad-students who suddenly seem to be in charge of the direction of our school. Our students need fractions, not Foucault. Children cannot lead “sustained dialogues”. That is why they have teachers, and the only thing that should matter is the qualifications of those teachers - not their skin color, sexual orientation, or anything else. The only question should be, “Are they *good* teachers?” Good teachers take complicated issues and boil them down to be simpler and more accessible for the developmental level of their students. Woke teachers, on the other hand, purposefully obfuscate with overwrought complexity masquerading as truth, for explicitly political ends. How confused would children be if, because of some strange cultural phenomenon, all of the nation’s physics teachers suddenly became convinced that every first-grader needed to understand - and really process and be able to vocalize the implications of - Einstein’s theory of relativity? And if they couldn’t clearly do that, we’d tell them they needed to keep working on themselves, because they *should* be able to do that, *right now*, and if they still couldn’t, they’d be participating in racism. That approaches the level of inanity that would insist on our instituting the teaching of critical race theory to grade-schoolers.

#5 - Where we go from here must include *all* voices.

My own children will certainly not be participating in divisive, harmful activities which undermine the unity of their school and impede the progress of their educations. Because I have the uniquely privileged¹⁵ opportunity to be so physically close to their daily experiences, I can mitigate some of the damage in ways that less informed parents¹⁶ may not be able to. But as an insider, I write to inform other parents that these changes are real, substantive, and

¹³ Children should be shielded from their teachers’s personal opinions rather than subjected to them. It’s my professional view, with 15 years of trying to teach literature as objectively as possible, that if your students know what your politics are, you’re doing it wrong.

¹⁴ The opacity of the language of critical theorists helps to disguise the flimsiness of their actual ideas and is a feature of their writing. It can be helpful to have a [translator](#).

¹⁵ TM

¹⁶ While the [entire discussion](#) is good and informative, Coleman Hughes directly addresses a question, at the 53 minute mark, about the NAIS and the People of Color Conference that the school is currently sending students and faculty to attend, and from which much of this poisonous ideology emanates.

transformative. ██████ Academy, in many ways like the rest of American society, is not what it was a mere five years ago¹⁷. I stress again the fact that there has been no actual, community-wide, discussion of these changes. The pandemic has exacerbated already fraught fault lines in our communities, schools, states, and nation. Inflicting these divisions on our children, purposefully, without democratic debate, is unwise. Abandoning traditions in moments of panic is unwise. Adopting a new religion¹⁸ - and that is clearly what postmodern critical theory is - amidst a hysterical moment is unwise. Wisdom is not the same thing as intelligence, or knowledge, or mastery. But it should be the target upon which we aim to launch the life-long learning trajectories of our children. We cannot shuttle them off on such a journey if our own crafts are hijacked by divisive, ideological infighting. They've come for the school founder¹⁹ and they're being greeted with open arms...

Let's have a reasoned discussion with all perspectives²⁰ allowed to participate. It seems to me that a deep breath and a pause would be prudent. What do we want our school to look like once the wave has washed over us? It would be terrible if we woke up from the fever dream of the last year to find an unrecognizable institution. When everyone is trapped and left alone to process their individual experiences, fear and over-reactions proliferate. I have attempted to take that psychological reality into account in examining my own motivations. Having done so, over the course of this tumultuous year, and without speaking out in any way to this point, I feel confident in saying that we - the parents of ██████ Academy's students - need a forum in which to at least discuss the significant philosophical upheaval that our school is experiencing. Because I love this place, I earnestly want to avoid the negative impacts that other schools²¹

¹⁷ It was a different time in many ways, but my spring semester here, as a Junior in 1997, is illustrative. I rode in the Spanish teacher's VW bus, adorned with dancing bear stickers, to tour the Martin guitar factory in Bethlehem, PA. At the very same time, our English teacher assigned Ayn Rand's *The Fountainhead* to the entire class. We spent months on it. Neither of those things could happen now, and we are worse off because of it.

¹⁸ As for me and mine, we'll stick with the religious tenets we've always held. That the school used to have some too was a positive thing, not a detriment to be excised. I'm not sure if anyone realizes that the upper school has only held a few virtual chapel services this year or that the lower school has hosted *none at all*.

¹⁹ If we don't hit back on moronic nonsense like this, we will well and truly deserve the coming backlash. That this is what passes for "scholarship" in our universities is disquieting.

²⁰ From [diverse](#) voices.

²¹ [This](#) is a good example of the kind of school that we *are not*, and never have been.

have suffered²² and make it the best school it can possibly be for *all* of the children of [REDACTED] Academy.

Sincerely,

[REDACTED]
Upper School English Teacher
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

²² And the suffering has been [substantial](#).