

Subject: Resolution No. 212-2A1

In Response to Ongoing, Pervasive Systemic Racism at Lowell High School

Commissioners Alison M. Collins, Gabriela Lopez, Matt Alexander and
Student Delegates Shavonne Hines-Foster and Kathya Correa Almanza

WHEREAS: Founded in 1856 in San Francisco, Lowell High School is the oldest public high school west of the Mississippi. At the date of its founding, Black, Latinx, Asian and other non-white students were prohibited from enrolling in Lowell High School and all other San Francisco public schools; and

WHEREAS: Prior to this year, Lowell was the only high school in SFUSD to use academic criteria for admission. California Education Code Section 35160.5 states that high-demand schools must enroll students through “a random, unbiased process that prohibits an evaluation of whether a pupil should be enrolled based upon the pupil’s academic or athletic performance.” For this reason, if SFUSD were to return to using academic performance for Lowell admissions, it would be out of compliance with state law; and

WHEREAS: Lowell High School’s previous admissions process created a school that does not reflect the diversity of SFUSD students and perpetuates segregation and exclusion. Lowell today enrolls less than 2% Black students, less than 12% Latinx students, and 0.4% Samoan Pacific Islander students, in a district that enrolls 8% Black students, 32% Latinx students, and 0.8% Samoan Pacific Islander students; and

WHEREAS: In 1978, the San Francisco branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (“SFNAACP”) filed a class-action lawsuit on behalf of Black families with the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of California, charging the SFUSD, its board members and superintendent, the California State Board of Education and its members, the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, and the State Department of Education with engaging in racially discriminatory practices and maintaining a segregated school system in San Francisco, in violation of the constitutions and laws of the United States and California; and

WHEREAS: This lawsuit resulted in a settlement between the SFNAACP and the SFUSD in which both parties submitted to a consent decree which over time “largely achieved the decree’s desegregation goals,” and resulted in improved academic achievement for Black and Latinx students;¹ and

WHEREAS: Despite the settlement of the NAACP lawsuit, the segregation and exclusion of Black and Latinx students at Lowell has been allowed to continue for decades. In 1986, there were 6% Black students and 7% Latinx students at Lowell, in a district that enrolled 21% Black students and 18% Latinx students. Then Superintendent Cortines committed to making Lowell “reflective of all the city’s kids,” a promise that has been broken now for 35 years²; and

WHEREAS: Black, Latinx, and Samoan Pacific Islander students in SFUSD often express concern they do not feel physically, emotionally or culturally safe and valued at Lowell; and

WHEREAS: In 2016 Black Student Union (BSU) leaders staged a walkout from the school to City Hall after the administration failed to respond appropriately when a student posted a sign in the school’s library titled “Black History Month #gang”, which included a picture of President Obama and pictures of rappers.³ Student leader Chy’na Davis, a

¹ <https://www.clearinghouse.net/detail.php?id=9939>

² Rand Quinn, *Class Action: Desegregation and diversity in San Francisco Schools*, p. 92

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https://twitter.com/ABlackCoalition/status/702191547266125824?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Cwtterm%5E702191547266125824%7Ctwgr%5E%7Ctwcon%5Es1_&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.motherjones.com%2Fpolitics%2F2016%2F02%2Fhigh-school-activists-walk-out-protest-racist-sign-and-demand-more-black-lives-matter-c%2F

sophomore at Lowell High said, “There are so many small, daily incidents and comments that stereotype us.” Davis and other members of the Lowell BSU: “We just feel like our individual complaints are not taken seriously by the school;”⁴ and

WHEREAS: The SFUSD responded to the list of student demands presented at a subsequent Board of Education Meeting, yet five years later, many of the actions have not been implemented; and.

WHEREAS: In 2020-21 BSU leaders continue to testify at Board of Education Meetings, at school meetings and via social media that they continue to experience ongoing constant racial microaggressions, a term that Ibram X. Kendi, a critical race scholar, says should more accurately be called racist abuse.⁵ and

WHEREAS: Over the years, Board of Education Commissioners, superintendents, scholars and community members have consistently cited Lowell’s selective, exam-based enrollment system as a major contributing factor which perpetuates the culture of white supremacy and racial abuse towards Black and Latinx students.⁶ and

WHEREAS: Ibram X. Kendi, recently reiterated this assessment in a public statement he read to the Boston School Committee in support of its decision to suspend the exam requirement used in admission to its selective enrollment schools. He stated: “This is the elephant in the room that the people claiming the standardized test is fair do not want to discuss. They will claim white and Asian kids on average score higher on tests because they are smarter or work harder. Meaning Black and Latinx kids are not as smart or not as hard-working. Meaning white and Asian kids are superior. And all these racist ideas from people claiming they are not racist.” He then explained that standardized tests were created and popularized by Stanford University psychologist and eugenicist Lewis Terman more than a century ago who believed results of these tests showed “enormously significant racial differences in general intelligence, differences which cannot be wiped out by any scheme of mental culture”;⁷ and

WHEREAS: SFUSD is deeply committed to affirming the lives of our students and has been changing our institutional culture to align with that commitment and undo the normalization of inferiority and bias, as evidenced by the Equity Studies Resolution, the Undocumented and Unafraid Resolution, the Safe and Supportive Schools Resolution and the In Support of Creating a K-12 Black Studies Curriculum that Honors Black Lives, Fully Represents the Contributions of Black People in Global Society, and Advances the Ideology of Black Liberation Resolution; and

WHEREAS: Lowell High School has often been referred to as SFUSD’s “elite” “academic” high school. San Francisco Unified School District does not believe that any student or school is more or less “elite” than any other school. All SFUSD high schools are academic schools; and

WHEREAS: Despite the District commitment to Equity for each and every student, not all students have access to the academic offerings that Lowell can provide based on its size and funding sources. The fact that Lowell has a selective enrollment system which excludes students of color, perpetuates the opportunity gap and prevents the District from fulfilling goals outlined in Vision 2025.⁸

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED: That Lowell High School will use the regular admissions process that is used by other comprehensive high schools in SFUSD in the 2021-2022 academic school year and beyond; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED: That the San Francisco Board of Education will initiate an MOU process with the [Education and Civil Rights Initiative \(CRI\)](#) of the [University of Kentucky College of Education](#), Lexington KY, in collaboration with the SF NAACP, California NAACP and National [NAACP](#) to facilitate the creation of a Community Coalition to define and oversee an equity audit and resulting action plan to address the exclusion and ongoing toxic racist

⁴ <https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2016/02/high-school-activists-walk-out-protest-racist-sign-and-demand-more-black-lives-matter-c/>

⁵ Kendi, Ibram X. How to Be an Antiracist. New York, One World, 2019.

⁶ <https://www.sfexaminer.com/news/students-families-call-for-culture-shift-at-lowell-after-racist-incident/>

⁷ <https://www.bostonglobe.com/2020/10/22/opinion/transform-bostons-exam-schools-into-opportunity-schools/>

⁸ <https://www.sfusd.edu/about/our-mission-and-vision/vision-2025>

abuse that students of color, and specifically Black students, have experienced at Lowell High School since the school's creation.

The SFUSD will direct resources and work with community philanthropic partners to fund the following proposed areas of work:

- Phase I —
 - Review status and fidelity of implementation of 2016 Lowell Black Student Union Demands and publish results for the public
 - Conduct an equity audit of Lowell High School based on past and previous student demands and current experience of Lowell student, families and staff;
 - Create an Action Plan to outline actions needed to remediate the needs of Lowell community members.
 - Publish results at the end of the audit and recommendations process and present to the Board Meeting by the end of the 2020-2021 academic year.
- Phase 2 —
 - Reviewing existing district-wide policies to make recommendations for improvements, including but not limited to the following:
 - District Bullying/Harassment Policy, to ensure it has a process for ensuring it is implemented with fidelity across all schools;
 - Anti-racist curriculum and curriculum educating students on Title IX rights and responsibilities as well as sexual harassment and LGBTQ harassment;
 - High school portfolio to assess and ensure equitable distribution of academic and extracurricular opportunities are available for students;
 - Family Voice, Uniform Complaint process and other district systems in place to support student and families in reporting harassment, and racist abuse and sexual harassment;
 - Establishing an ongoing community-based peer review process to ensure the work listed above progresses over time.

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED: That the SFUSD will work with the Office of Racial Equity, a division of the SF Human Rights Commission, in partnership with the SFNAACP, the California NAACP and National NAACP to establish a Community Coalition comprised of the SFUSD Black Student Union leaders, SFUSD African American Parent Advisory Council, the SF Alliance of Black School Educators, and other alumni, anti-racist educators, students, and community leaders to lead and inform this work. This project will be funded with outside funding.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED: That the Community Coalition will frame its work around questions that may include but are not limited to the following:

- How do we learn about the experience of Black students and families at Lowell and how do we center their healing, liberation, joy, and excellence?
- Where do we see tenets of white supremacy culture and patriarchy showing up in interactions, communication, curriculum, and policies at Lowell High School?
- What is the hidden and unspoken mission of Lowell High School and how do we communicate a clear and explicit mission that focuses on antiracist outcomes?
- What antiracist teaching, learning, and assessment practices are necessary? What adult learning and structures will support this change?
- How can we leverage Ethnic Studies, Equity Studies and Black studies in this work?
- What racist policies exist and how can we design antiracist policies, structures, and systems?
- What mindset shifts and equity consciousness development are necessary to facilitate this change, for students, staff, and the community?
- In what ways has Lowell High School perpetuated racism throughout SFUSD and San Francisco and how do we align district policies with its core values and antiracist vision?

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED: That the Community Coalition will report to the Board of Education no later than September 1, 2021