

On Friday, May 7th, 2021, a racist act took place in Fairfield Warde High School (FWHS). This horrific action was done by a white student at FWHS to a Black sophomore. This photo was taken without consent or knowledge and posted on Snapchat. His photograph was displayed with text saying “why is this n****r in my homeroom. Why isn’t he in chains?” Following this attack, a video call was placed by a group of individuals from Fairfield Ludlowe High School to the victim's brother that directed racist slurs to the young man.

These hate driven actions should not be taken lightly by anyone in the district, and town as it is a violation of the law, the victims’, mental well-being, emotional well being, and the safety that every student should be granted in their space of education. This student’s actions violate Connecticut General Statutes § 53-37 of Connecticut’s Laws, “A person violates this section if he ridicules any person or class of persons on account of creed, religion, color, denomination, nationality, or race.”

This is an act of racism, a targeted crime upon these two brothers and their family. We believe that given the significance, the extent of this crime, and the racial demographics of the town, that handling these series of actions to the fullest extent is necessary. Living in a 91.6% predominantly white town allows for Black, Indigenous, People Of Color (BIPOC) to already be at disadvantage. With moments of racist actions that are not dealt with correctly for the benefit of the BIPOC community, and the victims families, it creates a tonedead environment for these individuals leading the town.

This overt racism reveals that there is much more under the surface that many do not acknowledge. Racist acts are not new to the Fairfield Public Schools, not new to the community, and not new to our country. This is just a sample of what happens DAILY, BIPOC students experience racist slurs, microaggressions, and more. This reflects ignorance, a lack of education provided to the white and BIPOC students within this district.

When a racist act occurs in our schools, there are many layers to unpack, teach, and learn by the FPS leaders, administration, teachers, faculty, and students. We need to be able to have difficult and honest conversations throughout the district. Unfortunately, at the cost of the trauma the students and families endured, we hope that this event can lead to change.

We appreciate Mike Cummings, Paul Cavana, and Greg Hatzis coming out with a statement because words matter, but actions matter more. We must address this particular situation, but we also must make systemic change. These systemic changes are necessary not only for our BIPOC students but for our white students.

To create systemic change, we need to dive headfirst. Instead of putting out these little fires of racism, we should be working to prevent them from happening. BIPOC students shouldn’t have to encounter this type of racist harassment from other students.

The concern has mainly been, “what is going to happen to the perpetrator,” which is important, but what about the victims? They deserve peace. The victim's mom said, “I’m worried for the safety of my sons.” No one should ever be concerned about their safety in their own school, and worry that a fellow classmate might target them, yet so many BIPOC individuals in the town of Fairfield are.

We urge the Board of Education, administrators, teachers and faculty of Fairfield to feel the eagerness that this community needs. Having conversations as to why this is NOT tolerable by any student, or individual within this district is the only conversation needed. Moving forth action is needed and words will be taken as a lack of urgency for change.

As a coalition we aim to eradicate these incidents but without the proper conversations, and lessons taught to everyone in the FPS community, it just isn’t possible. Statements are great but they are not enough. We hope that it is understood that it does NOT end here, we are happy to provide guidance as we have for the past year. We have given the why, this incident provided the why, now it is your turn. We need the how, we need actions.

In Solidarity,

Lynnaija Brevard - Fairfield Equity Coalition, *President*

Andrew McKinnis - Fairfield Equity Coalition, *Community Outreach Overhead*

The Fairfield Equity Coalition