

**www.blackparentsworkshop.org**

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September 20, 2017

Dr. Thomas Ficarra

Interim Superintendent

South Orange-Maplewood School District

525 Academy Street

Maplewood, New Jersey 07040

Re: Access and Equity

Dear Dr. Ficarra:

We are writing on behalf of Ms. Chavonne McCray, and her son, a freshman at Columbia High School. Ms. McCray has informed us that her son’s teacher recommended his placement in an Honors World History class, and that request was denied by the guidance department. Her son’s guidance counselor, Ms. Hicks, has been a strong advocate for him but the department’s leadership is impeding students’ access to courses. Per Ms. McCray, the guidance counselor, in an e-mail communication, suggested that the department would pursue “alternate ways of meeting my child’s level.” This is an unacceptable response.

In this case we have a teacher, acknowledging the capabilities of the student, recommending the student’s placement in a class at a more appropriate level. The denial of this request is a clear example of the district’s practice of tracking African-American students into lower-level classes, beneath the breadth of their talents. It is unconscionable that a student would be held in a class that will have limited value to their academic growth. What’s more, the suggestion to a parent, a taxpayer, that some “alternate way” to meeting a child’s potential is a satisfactory substitute for access to courses which the parent’s tax dollars have supported, is an insult.

We cannot accept the continued relegation of African-American students to an inferior education and the denial of their legally entitled education commensurate with their white peers. The suggestion that the academic course load is incapable of absorbing such changes is a red herring given the district’s allowance for students to level down. Further, at any time during the academic year new students enroll in the district and are placed in classes in which their presence was not accounted for at the start of the school year. So, the idea that having students level up, as opposed to leveling down, creates some great inconvenience is simply unacceptable. The burden falls upon the district to meet the educational needs of its students.

We are requesting that this student’s teacher’s recommendation is honored and acted upon without delay. Any further impediment to the student’s academic progress will add to the evidence of the district’s intentional discrimination and bias against African-American students. We are closely monitoring this process and are in communication with parents who have similar objections to the placement of their children in classes that do not meet their preferred level of academic rigor.

Sincerely,



Walter Fields

Chairman

(973) 738-7876 – Direct

Cc: Mr. Robert Tarver, Esq., Legal Counsel, Black Parents Workshop

Mr. James Davis, Esq., Trustee, Black Parents Workshop

Elizabeth Baker, Board of Education