

To: Seattle Public Schools Board of Directors
From: Dr. Keisha Scarlett, Chief, Equity, Partnership and Engagement
Ms. Manal Al-ansi, Esq., Director, Department of Racial Equity Advancement
Date: September 18th, 2020
CC: Denise Juneau, Superintendent
Tim Garchow, Executive Director, WSSDA
Re: Bullying, Intimidation, and Anti-Black Racism

“If you are silent about your pain, they’ll kill you and say you enjoyed it.”

—Zora Neal Hurston

By way of official Board resolution, institutional policy and strategic realignment both the School Board and District have specifically identified the critical role of practices in support of racial equity and specifically Black Lives. In particular, the lived experiences of Black Boys, and the centering of their families and communities referred to as “furthest from educational justice.”

Keisha Scarlett, Chief of Equity Partnerships and Engagement and Manal Al-ansi, Director of the Department of Racial Equity and Advancement have written this letter to enter into the public record our adverse experiences of anti-Black, intersectional racism by Seattle School Board Directors in response to our Board/District-sanctioned anti-racism work related to Policy 0040.

As internal advocates for anti-racist conditions under which racial equity and pro-Blackness thrive, we have experienced retaliatory silencing and anti-Black racism at the hands of the School Board—specifically, Director Chandra Hampson and Board President Zachary DeWolf. Our safety, legitimacy as leaders, unique and necessary lived perspectives, and material contributions have been routinely marginalized and discredited in accordance with our proximity and alignment with white-centric institutional norms, and these Board Directors’ views.

On September 16th, 2020, Chief Scarlett and Director Al-ansi presented the most current community engagement updates regarding the first anti-racist policy in Seattle Public School’s history, Policy 0040. What was witnessed and experienced that day embodied for the public a view into the months of orchestrated bullying, escalating intimidation, gaslighting, and retaliation Chief Scarlett and Director Al-ansi endured privately by Director Hampson, and more recently, Director DeWolf. The ways in which both the policy and the presenters were received by these Board Directors, who have repeatedly asserted the necessity of Policy 0040, highlighted why anti-racist and pro-Black policy is critically important, and why policy without fidelity and integrity to the values that inform it is a demonstrably insufficient step in undoing

the ongoing and residual violence of institutional white racial terror *all* Black people endure. What we experienced in the routine execution of our roles betrayed a stark disconnect between closely held Board Director beliefs, the declared institutional values they purport to uphold, and the practices we might expect to see manifested in support of both.

In response to Chief Scarlett and Director Al-ansi addressing these Board Directors' demonstrated anti-Blackness and racist tactics, Director DeWolf and Director Hampson expressed a paradoxical, though precedented, "interest" in Black children while exhibiting a complete disregard for the communities, and people they come from. Rhetoric that echoes the most insidious intentions and histories of public education. The manifestation of the worst racist impulse which birthed residential schools—the unquestionable racial violence inherent in the separation of children from the cultural and communal contexts or care that nurtures their identities. Indigenous scholar and grassroots organizer, Michelle M. Jacob, cites schools as places where "we send our kids to become strangers to us. They go there to forget their ways and adopt new ways of being. We don't recognize them, and our ancestors don't either."

Board Director sentiments also betray a damaging intention and critical problem of practice for educators working in public education. **You cannot effectively lead for systemic equity if you fail to understand the connection between adult and child-targeted racism. You cannot claim to love or care for Black children if you are indifferent to their communities—the adults that raise them, whom the children literally grow into, and the Black Womxn that birth them.**

Dr. Mia Williams, Chief of SPS's Office of American American Male Achievement states that "BIPOC adults working in school systems are grown-up versions of our children." Detaching children from your disdain for their adult form is impossible. The notion that educational leaders can or should serve children while neglecting the whole constellation of adults and community supporting them is farce.

In full display of an already skeptical public, Directors Hampson and DeWolf took turns alternating between retaliatory and oppressive behaviors —bullying, intimidation, silencing, and gaslighting. Conduct reflective of questionable relationships and commitments to previous and current Board/District policies, resolutions in support of anti-racist, racial/gender equity principles, and *actual* Black Lives.

The following are examples* of our experiences with these Board Directors

1. Director Hampson began bullying Chief Scarlett and attempted to discredit Director Al-ansi in response to what she perceived as a loss of control or "ownership" over Policy 0040
2. Director Hampson orchestrated with external stakeholders the overt silencing of Director Al-ansi's board report, testimony and undermining the credibility of her policy work.

3. Directors Hampson and DeWolf scheduled a meeting with Chief Scarlett and Director Al-ansi, under false pretenses, so that they could continue to berate and discredit Director Al-ansi
4. Directors DeWolf and Hampson modeled overt silencing and chastisement of Black women in leadership, displaying the often public consequences Black women face for addressing the racism which Hampson and DeWolf, regularly claim a commitment to ending.

**See Examples Addendum for more detail/context*

**“If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor.”
— Archbishop Desmond Tutu**

Indeed, the burden and the accountability for formally addressing and undoing the impacts of institutional white racial harm is routinely and disproportionately held by People of Color—especially Black women. Historically and presently, Black women—in strength, solidarity, innovation, creation, and resilience—have carried and elevated the nation through racial justice movements, including the Black Lives Matter movement. Yet, our experiences as Black women, in particular, stand in glaring contrast to the declared District direction in policy, strategy and espoused practice regarding both racial and gender equity. Instead of respect and partnership, we are met with a predominately white and white-presenting School Board, with a track record of limited racial equity reform, openly and unapologetically discrediting Black women with rich personal and professional histories leading anti-racist or racial equity work. Our wholly appropriate conduct in service to the intentional racial equity and anti-racism work taken up by Seattle Public Schools has been confronted and measured against the very norms they were enacted to undo —white racial chauvinism and its institutional productions of (anti-Black) racist educational and professional standards of practices.

Colleagues that have witnessed these occurrences have reached out to Chief Scarlett and Director Al-ansi expressing shame, confusion and a sense of extreme distress and helplessness. These quintessential “bystander” experiences highlight the necessity of anti-racist policies and practices that offer recourse to those witnessing or experiencing racist conduct, and Board accountability in alignment with those policies. An anti-racist policy framework —properly informed by a robust analysis of anti-Black racism, pro-Blackness, colorism, and their relationships to racial whiteness— and Board adherence to such policy and values can counter normative racist practices leading to more “safe and welcoming” educational and professional experiences in Seattle Public Schools.

SPS has explicitly assumed the responsibility for the development of a “safe and welcoming”, anti-racist system of public education at SPS. The Divisional and Departmental leadership in Equity, Partnerships and Engagement Division, along with the Office of African American Male

Achievement, are specifically, though not exclusively, charged with establishing theories of action and change related to “equity.” Such policy and practice inform and prescribe the activities of School Board member, the district superintendent, senior leadership staff (“small cabinet”) as well as other central office and District supervisors and administrators, including individual school teams. The School Board of Directors is a crucial governance structure to provide critical leadership for systemic equity through policy, resource allocation, community and family engagement, comprehensive communications, and monitoring system-wide performance (Leverett, 2016). As fellow experienced systems-leaders, the School Board also has a critical role and responsibility in assessing, identifying, and remediating organizational conditions that constrain the advancement of racial equity and mitigate the after-effects of anti-Black racism in Seattle Public Schools.

Recommendations for Remediation, Reconciliation and Reparation

1. **Ensure Equitable and Respectful Board Director Interactions** with Chief Scarlett and all members of the Equity Partnership and Engagement Division (EPE), specifically from Board Directors named in this letter. EPE staff are scheduled to present at future committee meetings and specifically the upcoming work sessions on ~Tuesday, September 22nd, and ~Wednesday, October 28th. There should be no further instances of retaliation, dehumanization, or silencing.
2. **Reaffirm Board Commitment to Anti-Racist Principles and Practices** that bullying, intimidation, silencing, and dehumanization of Seattle Public Schools personnel has no place in the District. Demeaning Black leadership in “private meetings,” text messages or public forums should neither be endorsed, condoned, or tolerated by the Seattle Public Schools Board of Directors.
3. **If You See Something, Say Something.** Don’t allow anti-Black racism to unfold before you. Use your positionality to “call-in” colleagues in the spirit of learning, growth, progress, and enlightenment around their blind spots. As Board Directors, silently observing is unacceptable.
4. **Trust Black People**, children, and adults, including those in positions of leadership in classrooms, families, community, or within this institution. Trust our community-centered and racially-just processes and practices. They will feel foreign and will differ from the institutional norms in place. Yet, such leadership, processes, and practices are behind much social movement and progress in this country, including the fight to ensure that Black Lives Matter.
5. **Disrupt White, Racist Institutional Norms and Practices** publicly or privately undermining the individuals tasked with carrying out critical anti-racism work by the Board Director or their surrogates is unacceptable. Board positions should refuse the co-opting of the work or presentation of the work on Policy 0040, or any other body of work, led by Black people in community or SPS.

6. **Racism by Proxy is Still Racism** Do not cloak Board member agendas with Black people children and other community members —while actively marginalizing, belittling, humiliating, and dehumanizing Black people in day to day practice. Eschew the practice of weaponizing women of Color who are warriors in this work and deeply care about justice for BIPOC communities, especially through pitting people and communities against one another according to your political interests.

With Concern,

Dr. Keisha Scarlett, Chief of Equity Partnerships & Engagement
Manal Al-ansi, Esq., Director of the Department of Racial Equity Advancement