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**Fwd: [board] African American Teachers at Frank Allis Called the N-Word by White Student**

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Tue, Nov 26, 2019 at 5:47 AM

**From:** Kirbie Mack**Date:** November 25, 2019 at 4:23:24 PM CST**To:** Michael Hertting <[mhertting@madison.k12.wi.us](mailto:mhertting@madison.k12.wi.us)>, Board <[board@madison.k12.wi.us](mailto:board@madison.k12.wi.us)>**Cc:** "Dr. Alexander Gee Jr.", Henry Sanders, Kaleem Caire, Floyd Rose, Jonathan Gramling**Subject: Re: [board] African American Teachers at Frank Allis Called the N-Word by White Student**

Hello Again Michael,

Can you tell me when you will investigate to verify that the teachers were actually called the N-word, as reported to you and the District on November 4, 2019? I understand that you have not, as of yet, reached out to the teaches which were affected. As of today, can you assure us that the white student has not repeated these actions, of calling African Americans at Frank Allis Elementary School, meaning: teachers, staff and students the N-word? If not, when and what actions have you or the Board taken to speak with the staff or students in MMSD who have been subjected to being called the N-word while on school grounds?

Sincerely,

Kirbie Mack

On Thu, Nov 21, 2019 at 5:46 PM Michael Hertting <[mhertting@madison.k12.wi.us](mailto:mhertting@madison.k12.wi.us)> wrote:

Hi Ms. Mack:

Thank you for your additional thoughts. I appreciate them. Sincerely, Mike

Michael Hertting, Ph.D.

Interim Assistant Superintendent for Staff &amp; Operations

Interim Chief of Staff

Madison Metropolitan School District

[mhertting@madison.k12.wi.us](mailto:mhertting@madison.k12.wi.us)

608-663-1607

On Wed, Nov 13, 2019 at 3:21 PM Kirbie Mack wrote:

Good Afternoon Mr. Hertting,

Dr. Alex Gee and I are in receipt of your communique dated, November 8, 2019. Thank you for your assurance that the matters addressed in our communication will be investigated. Please be reminded that the issues discussed were previously brought to the

attention of Superintendent Cheatham, her HR staff and Principal Cutler, yet the staff at Frank Allis continued to be subjected to being called the N-word.

In your letter, it states "Our team has already begun a review of our practices around the use of hateful speech...." We ask that attention also be given to the District's *policies and procedures* governing this area; and if necessary they be created and/or modified. While we understand matters of this nature are confidential and you are "not able to share the full results..." we do expect that these individuals will be informed of their rights before the investigation ensues wrt retaliation; and will receive an apology from the District, at its conclusion. In addition, we ask that cultural sensitivity training be required throughout the District.

In the meantime, what might be helpful is to read books by African American authors both locally and nationally concerning the use of the N-Word. For example, Ta-Nehisi Coates' who writes about cultural and social issues, provides an incredibly clear explanation for why white people shouldn't use the N-word. He addresses the topic of words that don't belong to everyone. I encourage the District and the Board to take time to better understand this subject matter. It's shameful that the MMSD in 2019, is still struggling with how to best implement policies and procedures to address the use of derogatory language directed at their employees the workplace.

Sincerely,

Kirbie Mack  
Former City of Madison and State of Wisconsin Official  
Former President of NAACP, Madison Branch

On Fri, Nov 8, 2019 at 4:53 PM Michael Hertting <[mhertting@madison.k12.wi.us](mailto:mhertting@madison.k12.wi.us)> wrote:

Dear Ms. Mack and Dr. Gee:

Thank you for your letter to our Board of Education. Both Superintendent Jane Belmore and our Board of Education take these issues very seriously and are appreciative of your reach out.

As recommended we will investigate the concerns you have raised in your email. Our team has already begun a review of our practices around the use of hateful speech and how we work through those situations, both with our staff and with our students.

The information you sent to us involves MMSD employees and MMSD students. While we are committed and will conduct the necessary reviews we will not be able to share the full results for the following reasons: First, we do not release information on personnel matters involving our employees as such information is considered confidential. Secondly, we do not release student information as it relates to discipline or school placement. Doing so would be a violation of the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA).

We have much work to do in MMSD and our Board is committed to our work around race and equity. We know our Board is working hard to ensure that our next superintendent will continue the work that has been started. We appreciate and value the partnerships with our

community partners, all of who want outcomes to improve for all MMSD children as well as to ensure our schools are welcoming to all staff, especially our staff of color. Respectfully, Mike

Michael Hertting, Ph.D.

Interim Assistant Superintendent for Staff & Operations

Interim Chief of Staff

Madison Metropolitan School District

[mhertting@madison.k12.wi.us](mailto:mhertting@madison.k12.wi.us)

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On Mon, Nov 4, 2019 at 11:04 AM Kirbie Mack wrote:

November 4, 2019

TO: MMSD School Board and President Gloria Reyes  
MMSD Interim Superintendent Jane Belmore

We write this letter to express our concern at the lack of support offered to four African American staff at Frank Allis Elementary School that have been victimized by the repeated use of the N-word by a white student. Concerns expressed from these teachers and staff was allegedly reported to Principal Sara Cutler at Frank Allis Elementary School with no substantive action or reparations to these employees. It has been brought to our attention that two of the four have even left the school and/or the District.

As an African American woman who has served as both a City of Madison and State of Wisconsin Public Official, and has dedicated her life to serving this community, along with the Rev. Dr. Alex Gee, a prominent African American Leader in Madison who has also dedicated his life and service to the Madison community for over three decades, we are astounded to hear how hurtful and unresponsive the District has been in addressing such derogatory language towards staff. Rarely, if ever, have either of us been called the N-word, and certainly not to our faces. Sadly, the majority of African Americans who worked at Frank Allis Elementary School in 2018-2019, are not able to say the same.

There appears to be inconsistencies in the District's policies, procedures and practices as it relates to their "zero-tolerance policy" when it's directed at African American staff and student(s) at Frank Allis Elementary School. According to information we were able to obtain, last school year (2018-2019), a young white male student at Frank Allis Elementary School called four out of the five African American staff, the "N-word." One teacher, after being called the word *twice* in front of a full class of students, felt such a lack of support from the principal, he had to reach out to the Teachers Union for action, ultimately resulting in that student being removed from his class. At this time, we are not aware of corrective action taken or required on the student or parent's part. Based on the timeline, we were able to determine that this student called yet a second African American teacher the N-word.

Reportedly, the principal of Allis and District was notified, though no action on behalf of the victimized teachers and staff was addressed.

Subsequent to learning the aforementioned, it was said by a third African American staff person at Frank Allis that not only had she been subjected to being called the N-word by this same white student, but the student actually spit in her face! The staff person continued their account, reporting that this student physically attempted to stab her with a fork from behind while other children fearfully observed. Fortunately, she was able to grab the fork in time, preventing the attack. Based on our inquiries, the District was aware of this student's horrific and troubling behavior towards African American staff and did little to nothing, once again, to protect these staff members. Which, we conclude, is likely why when the fourth African American staff member, when asked to discuss the incident, stated "I'm not feeling confident that it will change anything."

We would like to inquire if any additional incidents involving the use of derogatory language and/or violence has been directed at any remaining African American staff or students, as well as, what the District has done to support the African American staff of Allis, both then and currently. More so, we are concerned at the number of calls and concerns expressed by African families involved with Frank Allis. We would also like to inquire whether families of the children exposed to this heinous word were notified and what support was offered. It is truly sad and demeaning that children at Frank Allis have been exposed to the N-word directed to their teachers and staff of color. Such traumatic verbal assaults have likely impacted these children, resulting in an adverse affect of their self-image to impacting their academic performance. If this student was able to remain in class, what has this taught these children? Were families notified and offered tools to help these students? In all likelihood, not.

The blatant disregard for African American teachers and staff is both heartbreaking and disingenuous, yet revealing. Based on our accounts, the District has not apologized or enforced any remedies that have effectively resolved this matter for the employees. The acts of the administration and the principal must be investigated by an outside entity, for clearly they are in need of assistance and awareness. Based on numerous accounts by other staff and families communicated to us, as well as the media, the MMSD has certainly contributed to the racism that exists here in Madison and the reasoning as to why Madison now has become a public health crisis for African Americans.

Lastly, we learned that one of the administrators who also failed to help rectify this situation at Allis was recently promoted to a principal position at another school. Again, so typical of MMSD to reward an employee abdicating their responsibility when it comes to issues of race. Meanwhile, two of the four African American staff called the N-word, have left Frank Allis, and now we understand why!

The District's "Behavior Education Plan" states "We believe ...in a striving school environment where staff and students are physically and emotionally safe." The Plan goes on to say, "We will... utilize innovative strategies and supports to create a positive school community where students, staff and families feel safe." Based on our interviews, these staff members did not feel safe nor supported by the District. The African American community has clearly understood that our children have been - and continue to experience - a different level of support from

the District. Unfortunately, this also appears to be a pattern with African American staff, as well. Perhaps, this is why the District has a real challenge recruiting and maintaining a diverse workforce.

We refuse to remain silent on this matter. We demand new leadership who understands the danger of these issues and will work to create an even and safe playing field that is truly inclusive of African Americans and takes *real action* on such racist language used towards African American staff. The District must focus on cleaning up “home” rather than lamenting the difficulty of attracting and retaining more African American teachers.

As such, we are recommending the following:

1. An investigation be undertaken of Principal Sara Cutler as to what actions were taken in each of the instances concerning these four staff members in 2018-2019, concerning the use of the N-word;
2. An investigation of why this student remains at Frank Allis Elementary School and if there have been repeated incidents of the use of the N-word as well as violence against African American staff and students;
3. A survey conducted of all African American teachers/staff as to: their working climate; if they have been called the N-word by a student or teacher; if the act was reported, and what action(s) did the school and District take. We request an assurance that no retaliation by the District will result due to their participation in the survey;
4. A review of the policies, procedures and practices of MMSD as it relates to “zero tolerance” and hateful speech primarily when the target is African Americans; and
5. A report as to what course of action the District took in response to this student’s *repeated* violation of the District’s Behavior Education Plan.

Sincerely,

Kirbie Mack,  
Former COM and SOW Public Official  
Past Pres. NAACP/ Madison Branch

Dr. Alex Gee,  
Founder and President of  
Nehemiah Board of Directors

Cc: Madison365  
Charles Hamilton Houston Institute  
One City Schools  
AACC  
Madison Network of Black Professionals  
Black Educators Network  
NAACP of Dane County  
100 Black Men of Madison  
Madison Times

