

Dear Winterhaven Community -

Marisha Childs, our PTSA Cultural Enrichment Chair, recently shared a [statement](#) with the community addressing her daughters' experiences as minority students at our school. Subsequently, other parents have alerted the board to further incidents of racism and homophobia at the school.

The Winterhaven PTSA board is writing today to reaffirm the [PTSA Statement of Values](#) we shared in November: *that all children, families, teachers and community members are and forever will be welcome in our community.*

However, our community has more work to do in order to become a truly inclusive haven for **all** of our students. We cannot and will not be an unsafe place for any student.

The board has put together a short list of suggested actions we believe can improve communication regarding diversity within our community. We hope you will take the time to share these with your families:

**Children of color and their families should be trusted when sharing their experience.** This means taking time—and being open—to listen and accept what is shared.

**Prepare to be uncomfortable—and acknowledge it.** Listening to new information can be difficult, but important. Be ready to sacrifice your comfort for the sake of necessary conversations.

**Resist the urge to defend yourself.** Your feelings of being criticized don't take precedence over the person sharing their concerns.

**Don't speak for someone else.** If you didn't experience the oppression, your work is not to be their mouthpiece.

**Do speak for yourself.** Speak from the heart and let your authentic, imperfect self be accepted.

**Spread the word.** When you see someone doing good, talk it up and share it around—we all need encouragement.

**Work to build trust, safety, and shut down intolerance.** When children of color report that they are called racist names, we should stand with them. When girls at our school report that their peers say they aren't as "smart as the boys", we should empower them. When LGBT children at our school report feeling isolated or purposefully misgendered, we should welcome them. When a Jewish student faces a maliciously-intended swastika in their classroom, we should validate them. When differently abled children report that they feel alone and friendless, we should include them. Our children need to be heard and trusted, and these issues should be addressed quickly, directly, and clearly.

While each of us wants to be part of an affirming and supportive community, and most believe that we are already in one, the above incidents have all been reported by students at Winterhaven within the past two years. It's clear that we can do better.

We ask that each of us speak up and speak out to confront discrimination.

We ask that you work with us to collectively create and participate in available educational opportunities regarding race, class, gender, gender identity, ability, and sexual orientation. We will work to identify these opportunities and bring them to the community's attention. See [Cultural Diversity at Winterhaven](#) below.

We ask that each member of this community—staff, teachers, parents and volunteers—acknowledge the realities faced by our children in this school and commit to digging deeper, to provide a more just and more affirming community for each of them.

We know that all of our children—and their families—are worth it!

Thank you,

Signed, The Winterhaven PTSA Board:

Alan Scott, President  
Tam Boleyn Communications Chair  
Jonathan Caver, Co-Treasurer  
Marisha Childs, Cultural Enrichment  
Nicole Cordan, Fundraising Chair  
Heather Dickinson, Membership Chair

Rebekah Folsom, Community Service Chair  
Helga Fuller, Co-Treasurer  
Jason Giles, Teacher Representative  
Kari Key, Volunteer Chair  
Nicole King, President-elect  
Amy Rees, Secretary / Safety Committee Chair  
Kristin Teigen, Legislative Chair

### **Cultural Diversity at Winterhaven:**

8th grader *Alana Nayak* has taken on an initiative to combat these recent racist and homophobic incidents at Winterhaven. Alana is working with the Cleveland Equity Team and Mr. Sandilands to bring equity training into the school, and she and her mother, Alice, will be speaking at our next **PTSA Community Meeting** Monday, March 20th, 6:30-8:30pm.

Marisha Childs, PTSA Cultural Enrichment Chair, has done some tremendous work for Winterhaven in the past two years, including bringing the screening of the film, *Black Girl in Suburbia*, and the mobile exhibit, *Black History 101*, to the school, as well as fostering cultural diversity programming in the classrooms. Our school has grown with her in this role, but it's clear we have, and may always have, work to do to increase our diversity awareness as a white-majority school.

Some suggested reading as follow-up:

- [White Silence is Violence](#)
- [Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack](#)
- [Characteristics of White Supremacy Culture](#)
- [Ways to reduce complicity in a white-dominant society](#)
- [The privilege walk](#) (student exercise)
- [The five forms of oppression](#)
- [How white parents should talk to their young kids about race](#)
- [How I learned to love discussing race](#) (video)
- [Brightly list of books about race](#)
- [Black Lives Matter at School](#)
- [Teaching with Purpose](#)
- [PPS Courageous Conversation page](#)