

To the Conway School Board:

Our children have spent many years in the Conway school system. They have attended Conway Elementary, Pine Tree, Kennett Middle and Kennett High School. During this time they have had a number of outstanding educators. These people include: Patricia Poulin, Steve Bamsey, Donna Towle, Karen Whitley, Aimee Frechette, Jan Hamel, Penny Kittle, Jason Cicero, and anyone named Livingston.

Although we appreciate the effort and skill of these educators we have been overall dissatisfied with the educational experiences of our children, especially with Kennett High School. We attribute this to the overall atmosphere and culture at the school.

As parents of minority students we have ongoing discussions with our kids, their friends, and the parents of other minority students. Through these discussions we hear of a prevalent discriminatory culture. This ranges from the use of ethnic slurs by students to expectations of trouble and low academic achievement by staff and administration.

When our concerns were brought to the attention of the school leadership we have been confronted with either denial or the excuse that it is a "community issue". This has lead us to withdraw our kids from the Conway Schools, to sell our house in Conway, and to move to a more welcoming school district.

Many of our friends with students (some of whom are minority) still in the Conway schools continue to express their concerns and share with us the stories of the biases and prejudices their children face at school. For their sake, and the benefit of all those involved with the Conway Schools we hope you all take action to improve this situation.

It is our opinion that the Conway School District and perhaps all of SAU 9, should have mandatory diversity training. This training should begin with the leadership and administration (including school board members and SAU personnel), then the school staff, and finally with the students themselves.

We are not asking for any special considerations for our children, we are asking for them to have the equal opportunities afforded to them by the constitution. Being confronted with cultural biases on a regular basis is not equal opportunity.

These students go to an majority white school, lead by a majority white administration and staff, in an overwhelmingly, though increasingly diverse, white community. If you are not in the minority, or intimately connected with this population it is easy to overlook the situation. Yet the bias is there and needs to be addressed. We are calling for you, the leaders of the community, to address it.

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