



How to Improve the Private School Experience for Black Students

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Introduction

Two years ago, I learned more about the history and origins of private schools in America and was fascinated. Everything I learned validated my experience as an alumna and current parent in a private school. It motivated me to keep learning.

The reality is, the pervasive lack of awareness about Black students' history and experience in private schools across the country perpetuates challenges and stifles progress from generation to generation. This is problematic for many reasons, mostly because positive change won't fully be realized until all members of the private school community, particularly White families, better embrace one fundamental reality—private school enrollment flourished in response to desegregation and subsequent legislation. This history helped shape institutional and systemic barriers that won't meaningfully improve without deliberate, comprehensive measures. As a result, the entire school community suffers.

In this paper, I will share the abbreviated history of private schools and discuss how it permeates the experience for all families, particularly Black families, to this day. I'll also offer some insight into how to address these challenges to benefit the entire school community.

Note about terminology: For this paper, Black is used as an identifier to represent a person having origins in any Black racial group of African descent. Additionally, I use independent school and private school interchangeably. The experience for Black families is consistent, as the history of each type of school in America is intrinsically linked to our country's history with race.



The History

Webster's defines a private school as "a school that does not get money from the government, and that is run by a group of private individuals." In that respect, private schools were amongst the first schools established in America, before public schools. Collegiate School, a day school for boys, is the oldest known independent private school. It was founded in 1628 by the Dutch West India Company and parents in the Dutch Reformed Church. Modern-day, widespread, public education did not begin to take shape until the 1840s.

During this time, only White children were educated in public and private school as it

was illegal to educate slaves. With the passage of the 13th Amendment after the Civil War, around 1865, slavery was abolished. However, significant challenges to various laws and provisions designed to end slavery and educate all children were often ignored or manipulated for centuries after slavery ended.

It wasn't until 1954, with the passage of *Brown v. Board of Education*, that Black Americans started to experience progress related to the evolving school system. In this ruling, the Supreme Court found that racial segregation in public schools was unconstitutional. Despite the verdict, over

the next few decades integrating schools proved problematic against a backdrop of the civil rights movement; many local officials and schools, particularly in the South, disregarded the ruling.

Around the same time as the Supreme Court decision, enrollment in private schools in America exploded. According to the Southern Education Foundation website, “This exodus from public schools began in the 1940s when private school enrollment in the 15 states of the South rose by more than 125,000 students—roughly 43 percent—in response to U.S. Supreme Court decisions outlawing segregation in graduate and professional schools in the South. While the decisions only applied to institutions of higher education, watchful Southern leaders understood that desegregation might soon

spread to their public elementary and secondary schools, compelling them to react in ways to defend their way of life.”(1) White students left public schools to go to private schools where the ruling had no legal bearing. While private schools also provided a way for families to reinforce class, religious beliefs, and more, enrollment grew most notably in response to desegregation. It continued to grow at significant rates in subsequent years all across the country.

A few private schools chose to desegregate. Anthony Pierce, Jr. was the first Black student admitted to Georgetown Prep in 1953 to seventh grade. However, he later transferred to a majority-Black public high school when socialization was too hard. “Coed Sidwell Friends School in the District dropped its all-whites policy in 1956 after



trustees outvoted the head of the board, who feared interracial marriage, according to letters he wrote at the time. St. Albans School in the District followed a year later, admitting a sixth-grader named Frank Snowden Jr., [who went on to be] a Yale University professor. Bullis School in Potomac accepted its first black in 1966, and St. Stephen's in Alexandria in 1969. In 1965, there were 19 independent schools in the area enrolling a total of 120 black children, a tiny fraction of total enrollment," according to The Washington Post article, *Private Schools' Shift Was Slow, Painful for First Enrolled Blacks*.⁽²⁾ The private schools in the South lagged, enrolling their first Black students in the mid to late 1960s. Regardless of when this happened, enrollment was amidst a school climate of overt and covert racial harassment in all forms.

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, challenges to integrating public and private schools persisted. There was little to no guidance around desegregation, and White parents didn't like being forced to send their children to schools in the name of realizing racial balance. **Private schools allowed families to send their children to school in a way they had always known— separated from Blacks.**

Even though non-discriminatory policies publicly declared that private schools would not discriminate based on race, color, or national origin, private schools still had the autonomy to decide which children to admit, much like today. In [The Schools That Fear Built](#), Nevin and Bills discuss the aftermath of the resistance to desegregation in 1976:

"These [private schools] are schools for Whites. The common thread that runs through them all, Christian, secular, or otherwise, is that they provide White ground to which Blacks are admitted only on the school's terms if at all."⁽³⁾ The non-discrimination policy, has done little to ensure equitable representation, further enabling a homogenous community that sometimes includes a small, marginalized community of color.

To this day, private schools remain majority White. According to a report from the U.S. Department of Education that looks at private K-12 schools, of the more than 32,000 private schools operating in the United States during 2017-2018, sixty-seven percent of private school students were White non-Hispanic while 9 percent were Black non-Hispanic.⁽¹⁴⁾ Additionally, in The Washington Post article, *The Overwhelming Whiteness of U.S. Private Schools, in Six Maps and Charts*, Brown shares an analysis conducted by the Southern Education Foundation. It revealed that private schools continue to be disproportionately White and that Black, Latino, and Native American students are underrepresented, particularly in the South and West.⁽⁴⁾

Fast forward more than 65 years after Brown v. Board of Education, with years of resistance following that ruling, generations of not significantly addressing racial inequities in schools, and the recent social unrest in America (which includes hundreds of "black at" social media posts where students, alumni, and parents



anonymously share racist experiences in the private school community), and it becomes easy to see how today’s challenges are merely a carried-over, unresolved continuum of issues from the not-so-distant past.

It should be noted that some schools have made strides to build inclusive communities. Some have effective programs, significant racial diversity among the school community, and an engaged parent population of all backgrounds. Some focus a great deal on the social and emotional well-being of all students. These schools and the positive impact they are making, however, are few and far between. A pervasive, problematic school experience rooted in an unacknowledged connection to racism, and the system that perpetuates still prevails and inhibits significant progress.

The Impact

More than 50 years ago, Congress authorized the Coleman Report, a first-of-its-kind analysis of the disparities between White and Black students in public schools and the effects of that inequity on academic achievement. The survey results led to mass busing in public schools, something the author of the report would later admit failed. Regardless, it was the first attempt to better understand the educational experience of Black students through data. Many years later, significant research supports the notion that diversity—by race, gender, socioeconomic status, and more—is good for children. It’s been established by this large body of research that academic outcomes, a core, mission-relevant focal point for independent schools, are proven to be better for **all** students when a school community is diverse.

1865

Slavery is Abolished But Not Honored Everywhere

1940s-1960s

Private School Enrollment Explodes

1970s-1980s

Integrated Enrollment Continues But Racial Representation is Low

Brown v. Board of Ed. Passes & Mandates Integration

1954

First Black Students Integrate Private Schools; Racial Harassment Persists

1950s-1960s

K-12 Private School Enrollment is 67% White 9% Black

2017-2018



This means the best scenario for optimal academic outcomes includes having a diverse school community. Without adequate diversity in a private school community, it is inferred that students are not reaching maximum potential. These schools do not realize their greatest academic outcomes despite strong mission alignment to achieve academic excellence. While ongoing studies are needed to determine just how much diversity is required to realize the most benefit, the key point is that there is a positive impact for ***each*** student in the community, not just Black students, when a school community is diverse. **As such, every parent should have a vested interest in realizing a diverse school community as it benefits all students, and every school should, too, as it directly impacts the mission.**

The Impact:
Sense of Belonging

A diverse community is central to feeling a real sense of belonging in the school community, an essential need for students. Karen Osterman’s study, *Students’ need for belonging in the school community*, highlights that “individuals have psychological needs, that satisfaction of these needs affects perception and behavior, and that characteristics of the social context influence how well these needs are met. The concern here is how schools, as social organizations, address what is defined as a basic psychological need, the need to experience belongingness.”(5)

Even when Black students report feeling a sense of belonging in the school community, it’s conflicted because of lack of

representation and more. Dr. Jackson A. Collins' recent survey of 525 participants across 74 independent schools further validates this notion. In *Behind The Veil: New Data on Student of Color Experiences at Independent Schools*, Collins finds that students feel a disconnect in belonging because, while they understand the value of their educational experience, it is often sabotaged by feeling a responsibility to increase racial literacy or educate others in the school community about race-related issues and topics.(6) In *The Success of African American Students in Independent Schools* by Edith G. Arrington, Diane M. Hall, and Howard C. Stevenson, it's acknowledged that even when Black students report having a relatively good experience in a private school, they often feel "both connected and disconnected to their schools...because they encounter people and resources that affirm them within the school at the same time that they confront challenges to their sense of self and community."(7)

The Impact:

Racial Bias & Cognitive Load

As Jenny Anderson wrote in *Admitted, But Left Out*, even when admitted to private school, Black students are often not accepted. The article reports that students experience racism in these schools, and at best, it manifests as polite "indifference, silence and segregation."(8) Author Ellis Cose finds in [The Rage of the Privileged Class](#) that schools are full of people "who without intending to create racial hurdles or hostility, [they manage to] create a fair amount of both. That they cannot see what they have done is due partly to the fact that

they meant no harm and partly to a disinclination to examine whether the assumptions they hold dear are in accord with reality."(9) According to *The Success of African American Students in Independent Schools*, "by attending independent schools, black students must also grapple with implicit and explicit messages that the community they represent is not as valued in school as is the majority community."(7) **Private schools are predominantly White and not adequately equipped to deal with the daily racial and cultural needs of, and the overt and covert messages sent to, Black students.**

Compounding the experience further, Black students must consider school through a different lens than their peers. Cognitive Load Theory, first developed in the 1980s by Educational Psychologist John Sweller, is the notion that we all have a set amount of mental bandwidth to process information. For Black students, some of that space is used to process the school environment, which is predominantly White, culturally different, socially confusing, and sometimes racist. Myra Lalden writes in *The Psychology of Belonging (And Why It Matters)* that "when we find ourselves in situations where we are the 'out-group' or in an environment in which we feel like an outsider, we use our mental energy to monitor for threats, leaving fewer resources for higher cognitive processes. When students feel as if they don't belong in a school setting, the cognitive energy that should be used on social engagement and learning is being used to manage group barriers, discrimination and stereotypes."(10) Unlike

most of their White peers, Black students can't singularly focus on academics or whatever task is at hand in the private school setting. They must adjust mentally to the daily environment while also trying to learn math, social studies, and more.

The Impact:

Self-esteem & Mental Health

The toll of having to deal with daily biases and manage cognitive load informs the ability to truly realize a sense of belonging in the school community, leading to cascading issues related to self-esteem and mental health.

Without healthy self-esteem, one's confidence suffers, impacting happiness, social skills, self-worth, and more. Self-esteem develops over time through experiences—especially during adolescence. While there are multiple sources for self-esteem, scholars argue that parents and teachers, at home and school, have the most significant impact on its development. In *The Role of the Family in Building Adolescents' Self Esteem*, "The adolescents with a high level of self-esteem have the following characteristics: they are capable of influencing positively the opinion and behavior of others; they tackle new situations positively and confidently; they have a high level of tolerance towards frustration; they accept early responsibilities; they assess situations correctly; they communicate positive feelings about themselves; they succeed in having a good self-control and the belief that the things they are undergoing are the result of their own behavior and actions." (11)

Negative self-esteem can often trigger

mental health issues, such as depression. Our country's increasing mental health challenges, particularly among teenagers, is troubling. A study, *Trends of Suicidal Behaviors among High School Students in the United States: 1991-2017*, in the November 2019 issue of *Pediatrics* found increases in suicidal behaviors and thoughts among Black teens, far outpacing trends among White peers. Researchers for the study analyzed results of 198,540 young people from the 1991 to 2017 national *Youth Risk Behavior Survey*, which canvasses 9th–12th grade public and private school students in all 50 states and Washington, D.C.(12)

The history and timeline are straightforward—the experiences of Black students in private schools have not changed much over time as representation continues to be low and racial issues persist. **With an early history tethered to keeping private schools White and no overt, broad initiatives to improve in this area, private schools, perhaps unintentionally, continue to perpetuate the unresolved issues of the past.** This leads to lifelong challenges for Black students, from self-esteem and mental health issues to not feeling included and more. While Black students are more directly impacted, the larger school community also suffers in myriad ways which undermines the ability to truly be elite.

All of this is important to understand because it's impossible to significantly rectify present-day race-related experiences without first accepting the historical link and implications. With this knowledge, the root issues and exigencies of the moment become more clear.

Building a Unique Village

The African proverb, “It takes a village to raise a child,” is a universally known concept highlighting the notion that communities impact all children’s growth and development. To that end, there are an array of national and local organizations working to address various needs related to the Black community in school—Village of Wisdom, the Independent School Alliance for Minority Affairs, Prep for Prep, Rainier Scholars, Oliver Scholars, A Better Chance, ConnectDMV, Black Youth Leadership Project, and many more. These wonderful organizations serve varied under-represented communities, mostly low-income, or help students in private and public schools. Some focus on achievement gaps or skill-building. Some concentrate on admissions or exposing Black children to career options. Some focus on single-sex programs, and some embrace the fullest definitions of diversity. Some are integrated within the school community, and others are very independent. **Few solely focus on Black students and their families in private schools despite the historical connection, legacy, and systems that keep Blacks out.**

Programs and organizations often overlook the Black private school community because of the assumption that the privilege of being in private schools means there are available resources and ways to meet all needs. While valid in that private school students are privileged to enjoy an elite education, this assumption perpetuates the often unhealthy experience of Blacks in private schools. Their challenges go unaddressed, generation after



generation, during the most critical developmental stages of life. Black students pay the price when we assume they don’t need assistance because they are in private schools.

This is where Private School Village (PSV) comes in. PSV is a parent-led, non-profit organization that focuses on providing programs and support for Black parents and Black students in private schools. The foundation for PSV is explicitly centered around acknowledging private schools’ unique history and the ensuing impact of systems that support institutionalized racism generation to generation. PSV relies on community-building and providing programs that bolster the student–parent–school partnership of support to enhance the experience.

PSV is a unique community of support, created for Black families by Black families. A highly collaborative organization, PSV brings together families and students from across private schools to share resources, centralize offerings, and truly build community. It is unlike any other organization.



PSV offers several inter-connected ways to significantly address the experience of Black families in private schools. This includes:

1. Increase Racial Socialization

The number one reason Black parents engage with PSV is that they want their children to see more of themselves in the private school setting. Black parents readily understand the benefits of socialization and mirroring opportunities and use these occasions to (re)affirm identity, educate children about societal messages and stereotypes, and more. Racial socialization is centered around preparing children for anticipatory experiences, building Black pride, and educating about racial inequalities.

One way some schools try to foster greater racial socialization is through affinity spaces and clubs. It's often difficult to provide regular and impactful racial socialization through these spaces, however, when racial representation is inconsistent or low, and when barriers in schools hinder maximum effectiveness (e.g., groups led by untrained facilitators, not fully understanding the needs of the affinity group, leaning too heavily on parents to manage initiatives, not resourcing groups in a meaningful way). While affinity spaces are important and helpful in private schools, until there is more consistency, standards, and greater representation, merely offering them is often not enough when it comes to providing meaningful racial socialization.

Through the **PSV Jamboree Program**, PSV provides opportunities for children to see more of themselves—children experiencing the same unique school dynamics, albeit perhaps at different schools—through myriad community activities and events. By providing opportunities to socialize or convene around a topic of interest (e.g., financial literacy, hair, the n-word, etc.), the PSV Jamboree Program helps parents know their children will be surrounded by a community of peers who understand their daily school experience. These activities and events are a vehicle to educate students about a range of things from learning about Black history and cultural traditions such as how to “double dutch” to ensuring they understand how best to handle themselves if pulled over by a cop.

“PSV is an awesome and necessary opportunity for African-American students in private school to meet, engage, learn, and support each other. It is also a well-needed opportunity for these students’ parents to meet, support, and learn about how best to navigate private school life with their children, faculty, and staff. PSV supports people of color to learn about our culture, embrace our differences, and to build a sense of community for our growing children who are in schools that are not diverse,” reported a PSV parent through an anonymous survey in February 2019.

Another parent reported in the same survey, “PSV is an opportunity for my son to feel free to be enveloped in his black identity. And his Caucasian parents love it.”

See addendum A for a list of activities and events that fall within the PSV Jamboree Program.

2. Increase Racial Literacy

Racial literacy is “a form of racial socialization and antiracist training” used by parents to prepare and protect their children against racism.⁽¹³⁾ It’s a concept that focuses on teaching how to identify, counter, and cope with racism. It is a practical, intentional effort designed to prepare and empower and involves understanding the intersections of power and race, recognizing racial systems, and adequately articulating racial terms.

There are currently several programs that teach racial literacy to teachers, which need expanding. However, there are few that focus on teaching racial literacy specifically to Black parents and Black students in private schools. PSV works to help families and students build racial literacy through the **PSV Bridge Program**. Many Black families navigate “two worlds”—one outside of school and another inside the school community. PSV helps bridge the gaps between those worlds and strengthens the ability to succeed in both by providing opportunities to build racial literacy. PSV strives to educate and arm families, from the earliest moments of joining the private school community, so that they are protected and prepared to thrive despite racial situations that often arise.

PSV offers a range of events designed to increase racial literacy. For example, through our regular webinar discussions, “Candid Conversations,” a moderated group of panelists explore topics such as using the n-word, implicit bias, Black history, affinity spaces, and more. Several well-known speakers have joined these conversations thus far, including:

- Rosetta Lee, Faculty & Outreach Specialist, Seattle Girls’ School
- Dr. Neal A. Lester, Foundation Professor of English and Founding Director of Project Humanities at Arizona State University
- Elizabeth Denevi, Director, East Ed, & Co-founder, Teaching While White
- Stefanie Brown James, Co-founder, The Collective PAC
- David Johns, Executive Director, National Black Justice Coalition
- Jeff Johnson, Social Architect, Storyteller & Chief Curator, Men Thrive

It’s especially crucial that White adults in our schools also build racial literacy and understand their role in creating change. It’s perhaps the one thing that would significantly bring about the most significant and radical improvements. The lack of active support for increased, comprehensive diversity and inclusion in our schools perpetuates challenges and impacts all students, especially White students.

By the middle of 2020, the U.S. Census Bureau estimated that non-Whites would account for the majority of the nation’s 74 million children. White students are now in the minority of the population. Still, in private schools, that notion does not seem apparent as diversity is not reflected in the school community. White students are not culturally educated and equipped to thrive in our diverse world. To change, it is critical that every parent understand the need, value, and importance of advocating for more diversity and inclusion more strongly. To assist in elevating that notion, PSV offers a 10-week series of facilitated discussions for non-Black adults in the private school community. The course is designed to take a deeper dive into race and make learning more accessible and achievable.

See addendum B and C for a list of activities and events that fall within the PSV Bridge Program.

3. Increase Representation

“Many of our children of color are in schools where they’re hiding in plain sight. Everybody else can see who they are, but they can’t see who they are themselves within the reflection of the school.”

— Reveta Bowers, Interim Head of School at The Center for Early Education on the eRaced podcast (October 2020)

All students benefit from teacher diversity. It is critical to offer the modeling and representation in leadership, but it is also essential to learning. In addition to the educational value of having differences in thought, culture, and experiences for all students, representation is especially important in school because children are forming their understanding of identity and self. In the absence of it, non-Black students formulate ideas from media and entertainment, which often portrays the cultural stereotypes of Black people. Even more, this can impact how Black students, who again, are developing a sense of identity and self throughout the school experience, see themselves. In most cases, Black students most certainly hear the message that their culture, their heritage, is not as important as White culture and heritage simply because representation is low in every aspect of school life. They may assume that it must not be as important because they don't see it well represented in the school community.

In *Psychology in the Schools*, Janine Jones wrote about middle school Black girls who felt more connected to, and involved with, school after participating in a program designed to create community and pride in Black culture and identity. "There are a lot of negative perceptions of African-Americans, and the perception they receive is that it's not a good thing to be black," said Jones, director of the University of Washington's School Psychology Program.(15)

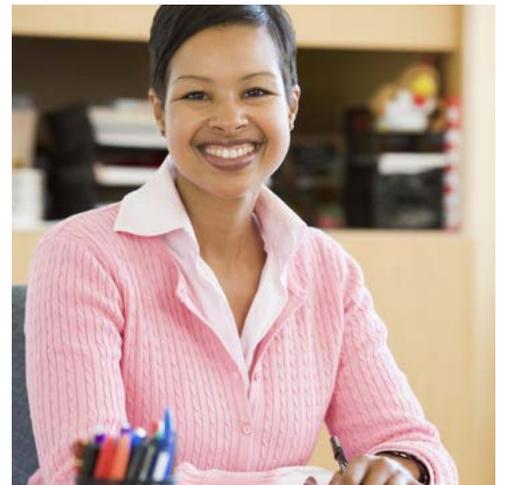


Additionally, if students don't see representation in various professional fields, they have a more challenging time seeing themselves in that profession later in life. This may be one reason why there are fewer Black administrators, faculty, and staff in the private school setting. Low racial representation breeds a limited, distorted view of anyone not White in private schools and sends a strong message to all students about value, future possibilities, and more.

PSV purposefully works to increase representation by focusing on the growth and retention of current Black students and families. Through our events and programs, PSV fosters community and addresses feelings of isolation, strengthens a sense of belonging, and educates and empowers PSV parents to be more engaged and in partnership with their school communities.

A core component of focusing on growth, retention, and building community is the **PSV Parent Ambassador Program**. Parent Ambassadors make themselves available to speak to prospective families, and they work alongside their schools to further a range of related diversity and inclusion efforts, such as recruiting and retaining Black families. They also support current families, particularly newly-enrolled families, to ensure they know about our community and help in their school experience. Minimally, the PSV Ambassador Program bolsters word of mouth among current and prospective parents, which has a tremendous impact on retention and recruitment.

As a current PSV parent shared in response to the 2019 anonymous survey, "I was able to meet a parent interested in going to the school my kids currently go to. I was able to advocate for her the next day with the admissions director. I'm not sure if her child will be accepted but the fact that we can care for each other this way positively influences that family, provides a supportive link to the community, and helps the admissions director to look favorably on the applicant."



4. Increase Related Research

PSV is committed to creating lasting improvement for Black students in private schools. As such, research-backed solutions that address student well-being is a priority. Well-being encompasses the social and emotional impact of being marginalized and the implications of low representation among students, administrators, faculty, and staff in these schools.

One area of opportunity is in better capturing and sharing data focused on representation. There is currently no comprehensive national, aggregated data that includes tracking of Black senior administrators, Black teachers, and Black faculty and Black staff in private schools. Or rather, this data is not readily available and shared so that interested stakeholders can collectively work towards improvement.

The National Center for Education Statistics bi-annual Private School Universe Survey currently tracks the number of full-time equivalent teachers, students by grade and race/ethnicity, pupil to teacher ratios, school size, graduation rates, and school memberships in private school associations, and more. It does not identify the race, and ethnicity of administrators, teachers, faculty and staff in private schools.

The most available data can be found in the 2019 National Association of Independent Schools State of Diversity report, which is designed to capture information about DEI practitioners in independent schools and related challenges. Through that survey, it was found that just 8% of heads of schools are people of color, and only 16% of all



administrators are educators of color. There is no breakdown by race and ethnicity of “people of color” or “educators of color” and no additional information. In the National Teacher and Principal Survey conducted by the U.S. Department of Education’s National Center for Education Statistics, it was found that 86% of private school principals were non-Hispanic White, while 5% were non-Hispanic Black or African American. This is all great information to know, but it needs to be much more comprehensive, clear, and tracked over time to monitor for trends and areas of opportunity. It is clear why there has been little improvement in racially diversifying the professionals working in private schools—we measure what matters, and to date, this has not mattered enough to be included in regular surveying and broadly shared.

This year PSV launched its first parent climate survey to better understand Black families' experiences in private schools. PSV hopes to measure progress over time, identify collaborative possibilities in the areas of greatest need, and educate parents and caregivers about the best ways to support their children through the experience. Information being tracked includes the number of Black teachers a child has had, whether affinity spaces are offered, the number of Board of Trustees who are Black, how parents respond to microaggressions, and more.

Future surveys will ideally include similar inquiry lines for students to expand learnings about the social and emotional impact, as well as a track for schools to report race and ethnicity of the entire school community, including administrators, faculty, and staff so that this information can be used to develop specific tactics and strategies for improvement.

The Path Forward

Merriam-Webster defines community as “a unified body of individuals.” Community connects us by common interests and characteristics. We are all members of many communities, and we frequently move in and out of them as they provide support, care, comfort, familiarity, and education. We need community in order to feel a sense of belonging and reassurance. Unfortunately, when Black families join a community whose origins are tied to keeping them out and where there aren't many culturally like them, it can have lasting implications for the school experience and beyond.

Black families apply to private schools feeling there will be an ongoing need to augment the curriculum, provide culturally relevant experiences, and more. Black parents concede that Black children aren't in private school for adequate racial



socialization or cultural affirmation. Many commit to joining social and civic organizations and stay rooted in the Black community through church, programs, and more. Like all parents, Black parents merely want to provide the best academic education for their children. An independent private education is an appropriate option; additional cultural needs can be supplemented.

While all parents need to provide appropriate cultural and social experiences outside of school, it's problematic to downplay the importance of these things in the school setting. For generations, Black families have made this concession, not acknowledging the significant role the school community plays in building self-esteem and teaching racial identity. There's no clear indicator that identity development can be successfully compartmentalized—students spend a good deal of time in the school community. In the absence of feeling culturally and socially affirmed during the school day, a void is created. That alone teaches them something about who they are and how they fit in.

The other problematic outcome for entering school with this concession is that it informs how many Black families engage with the school from the beginning. Black parents often join the school community with little expectation that their child's social and cultural needs will be met, and therefore show up in the school community disengaged to some degree. They



automatically have a lower threshold of expectation of the school. That is a significant loss for everyone involved and can hinder a parent's ability to effectively advocate when needed.

The challenges of being marginalized and dealing with overt and covert racism in a community aren't just experienced in private schools. There are related issues and solutions for public and charter schools, colleges and universities, and perhaps for corporate communities. However, Black students' developmental needs in private schools often go unmet year after year, in part, because of assumptions related to being in an affluent community with resources and because too few White families in private schools are actively advocating for improvement.

There have been roughly two and a half generations since the civil rights movement and the resulting explosion of private school enrollment. Yet, there has not been any overarching movement since desegregation to significantly improve in this area—it's no wonder racial issues persist. Relative improvements have been piecemeal and have not been comprehensive, measured, or replicated to ensure that all students benefit from a diverse school community, let alone ensuring that Black students, in particular, fully thrive. There are currently very few programs addressing Black students' unique challenges in private schools. The time has come for that to change.

By focusing on racial socialization, racial literacy, research, and representation, PSV is committed to improving the experience and well-being of Black students in private schools. PSV works with:

- **Students:** Through regular socialization, cultural education, and events, PSV addresses the need to belong and feel supported, and in doing so, helps Black students have a greater chance to thrive. Feeling a sense of community in the school setting can positively impact self-esteem, contribute to a healthier outlook, and have lifelong implications.
- **Parents:** PSV provides a community of support filled with shared experiences, helpful resources, and regular opportunities for education. PSV supports parents by discussing specific areas of need, such as dealing with teachers' unconscious bias, advocating for children, the n-word, parenting tips, and more. PSV works to empower and encourage parents to be partners with their schools to best support students.
- **Private Schools:** PSV works to introduce the private school experience to prospective families, enhance the experience of Blacks currently attending private schools and share resources and information that is in the interest of supporting the Black community. Through PSV, more satisfied and engaged families of color feel less marginalized and invisible in the private school setting.

The historical growth in private school enrollment, the ongoing, pervasive lack of representation, the impact on cognitive load, mental health, and more hinder an overall sense

of belonging. This can have just as much impact on a student's development as being bullied or dealing with any other issue that informs identity and influences well-being, the ability to learn, and thrive.

There are many more factors that impact Black student experiences. Some are mentioned very briefly in this paper, such as faculty and staff representation. Others, like the role of curriculum, aren't discussed thoroughly aside from referencing the importance of learning about culture and history. The ones referenced in this paper are a starting point for conversation and an important part of creating change. Improving Black students' experiences in private schools will require a more in-depth examination of all compounding factors to determine the greatest impact on creating meaningful and lasting change. There is so much more research needed.

Until then, we need organizations like PSV to work alongside parents, students, and school communities to help address Black families' unique experiences in these schools. This experience is fueled by a historical link to the racism that created systemic and institutionalized barriers to progress that prevails in schools to this day.

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Lisa Johnson

About the Author

Lisa Johnson founded Private School Village (PSV), a 501(c)3 non-profit organization that builds community among Black families in independent and private schools, in September 2018 with the help of a small group of friends.

Education and advocacy are in Lisa's lineage. In the late 1800s, when it was illegal to educate Black students past eighth grade, Lisa's great, great, great, grand-uncle Benjamin Tonsler had his older students stay after school to study more advanced texts, with the understanding that the books were

to be hidden whenever the White superintendent appeared for an inspection. He was a graduate of Hampton Institute and principal of Jefferson School in Charlottesville, VA, for nearly 30 years, and he prepared hundreds of students for college despite the law. From there, Lisa comes from a long line of educators and administrators so it's not a surprise she's working to make a difference in students' lives today.

A seasoned professional with 20 years of for- and non-profit experience, Lisa served as senior vice president of communications and marketing for the American Cancer Society (ACS) for six years in New York City. While there, she managed a regionally-dispersed staff of 20, championed award-winning strategies for engaging donors and volunteers, and launched some of the organization's first e-fundraising tools. Before her stint with ACS, Lisa worked for several organizations including Ketchum Public Relations, Black Entertainment Television, and on behalf of the for- and non-profit organizations and the special interests of Earvin "Magic" Johnson.

A graduate of an independent school in Atlanta, GA, The Westminster Schools, Lisa matriculated from the University of Virginia, where she earned a B.A. in Rhetoric and Communication Studies. Lisa, the proud mother of two children (who are gracing the cover of this paper), is married and resides in Los Angeles, CA.

About Private School Village

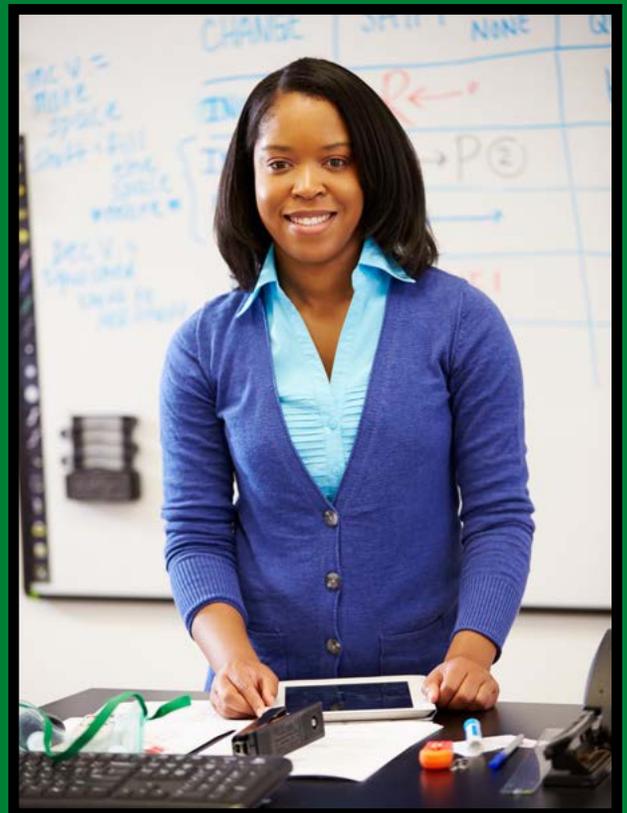
Private School Village (PSV) builds community by providing programming, organizing events, collaborating, and sharing resources that support specific, under-represented communities of color throughout the independent and private school experience (K-12). There is no membership fee or application— just acknowledgment that someone in the family identifies as Black, has an affiliation with an independent or private school or is an ally who wants to support Black families and students in these schools.

Learn more and join PSV at www.privateschoolvillage.org

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Note: This white paper is for informational purposes only and is the personal opinion of Private School Village Founder Lisa Johnson. The organization makes no claims or warranties, expressed or implied, in this summary. The information contained in this document represents the latest articles and data, as researched by Mrs. Johnson.

A special acknowledgment of appreciation goes to PSV Parent Wendy Wallace who assisted in editing this paper.



Addendum A: PSV Jamboree Program (Racial Socialization)

- **The PSV Book Club** is a six-week program held in collaboration with Roots of Knowledge Empowerment Institute. Facilitated by a Black lead, independent school teacher and several co-teachers, twenty students read and discuss books. This past summer, the students read Kinda Like Brothers and Piecing Me Together. In big and small groups, they explore age-appropriate themes around identity, community, brotherhood, and more.
- **The PSV NBA 2K Tournament** is a series of virtual gaming tournaments designed to build socialization using a medium already adopted by middle/high school teens, and typically by boys. The tournament aims to use a popular social medium to establish relationships that transition into supportive and educational opportunities (e.g. segueing to conversations about mental health, career opportunities and more).
- **Black Hair Care & Beauty Symposium** provides an affirming and educational opportunity for parents and their children to celebrate Black beauty standards. Panelists discuss the shared experiences and challenges of being in a school environment that often doesn't understand cultural boundaries and/or the larger issues related to being different in a homogenous school community. Following a lively discussion, local hairstylists and beauty experts provide tutorials about care in a celebratory culmination of the day.
 - Special Event: Middle and High School girls read and discuss 16-year old author Olivia V.G. Clarke's book, Black Girl, White School: Thriving, Surviving and No, You Can't Touch My Hair! This is another opportunity to build a stronger sense of self and cultural appreciation around a key aspect of identity.
- **Black History from a Decolonized Perspective** is an 8-week, forty-minute virtual class for up to fifteen students offered on a revolving basis. Most Eurocentric curricula begin Black history with enslavement, completely leaving out the rich cultural history many Africans had in their own societies. By teaching students about history pre-slavery, we build a deeper respect and self-confidence in black children.
- **PSV Brothers & Sisters Program (in development)**—This program pairs older PSV students with younger PSV students to provide peer mentorship and modeling. The year-long program facilitates friendship, crafts and activities, and offers older students the chance to build leadership skills.

Addendum B: PSV Bridge Program (Racial Literacy)

- **A Conversation with Dr. Howard Stevenson**—the nation’s foremost expert on racial literacy and health, Dr. Stevenson facilitated an important conversation with middle and high school students and their families about the health impact of racial stress and provided strategies and skills that both students and parents could employ to promote racial health and well-being. PSV regularly provides this type of educational opportunity with professionals who reinforce similar teachings around racial literacy.
- **Black Lives Matter @ School**—Dr. Jamila Lyiscott, a community-engaged scholar, nationally renowned speaker, and the author of Black Appetite. White Food: Issues of Race, Voice, and Justice Within and Beyond the Classroom, leads a series of powerful conversations with twenty students about what it means to be young, gifted and Black in private school. Through interactive discussions and fun exercises, “Dr. J” helps students find their voice, identify adult allies who can assist in ongoing development of their voice, and she introduces key concepts around youth activism and social justice in the school setting.
- **Witnessing Whiteness Discussion Series**—White allies in private school participate in ten one-hour workshops using Shelly Tochluk’s Witnessing Whiteness: The Need to Talk About Race and How To Do It as an interactive guide. A cohort of 15-25 White parents in private school learn about interpersonal, institutional and cultural racism, delve into personal experiences with race, develop skills and tools for anti-racism work and more. This course is designed to educate non-Black families in private school, as building allyship can assist in securing better support for all children.
- **Parent and Student Health & Mindfulness**—Regular, small-group sessions are offered to learn mindfulness and meditation. Conducted in partnership with the Sky Happiness program at UCLA, we introduce empirically-validated curriculum including yoga, breathing exercises, meditation, positive psychology, emotional intelligence, leadership and service learning.

Addendum C: PSV Racial Literacy

“Candid Conversations” have included:

- **The Race Talk & More:** This discussion focused on when and how to talk to children about race, unearned privilege and other things Black families really need allies and co-conspirators in school with us to know. Moderated by Attorney, Author and TV Personality Lauren Lake, our panelists were Writer, Actor, and Organizer of White People 4 Black Lives Kristina Lear and Educator and Author of Witnessing Whiteness, Dr. Shelly Tochluk.
- **Race, Rights & Other Realities:** This discussion focused on learning more about supporting meaningful, positive change both in and outside of the school community. Moderated by Social Justice & Political Activist, and Founder of The 2fifty Seven Group, Kristi Henderson, panelists included Director, East Ed, & Co-founder, Teaching While White, Elizabeth Denevi, and Co-founder of The Collective PAC, Stefanie Brown James.
- **We See You, Kings:** This discussion focused on ways to better celebrate and support our Black men, fathers, caregivers, uncles and brothers. Moderated by Producer and Lawyer Walter Mosley, panelists included David Johns, Executive Director of National Black Justice Coalition and Jeff Johnson, Social Architect, Storyteller and Chief Curator, Men Thrive.
- **Emerging Realities Facing Independent Schools:** Given the social and civic unrest, this discussion focused on learning more about the challenges being felt by schools during this unique time. PSV Founder Lisa Johnson moderated a conversation with Reveta Bowers, Interim Head of School at The Center for Early Education, and Cathy Shelburne, Director of Professional Development at California Association of Independent Schools.
- **The N-Word:** Parents, teachers, administrators, and co-conspirators, joined PSV Parent Ambassador Lauren Lake as she moderated a discussion with Dr. Elizabeth Stordeur Pryor, Associate Professor of History at Smith College and author, Colored Travelers: Mobility and the Fight for Citizenship before the Civil War and Dr. Neal A. Lester, Foundation Professor of English and Founding Director of Project Humanities at Arizona State University. A national voice on issues related to the n-word and American race relations, Dr. Lester created and taught the first undergraduate course on the n-word in the country.
- **Affinity Groups & Best Practices:** Parents, teachers and administrators were invited to join PSV for an informative discussion about affinity groups—how to start and sustain them and best practices with Rosetta Lee, Faculty & Outreach Specialist, Seattle Girls’ School, and Gina Parker Collins, Founder, Advisor and Parent Leader, RIISE - Resources In Independent School Education.

Addendum D: Sampling of PSV Program/Event Flyers

Engaging with Police

Are your children afraid of the police? Does your teen know what to do if they're pulled over or if they're a passenger when a classmate is pulled over?

Join us for an afternoon of fun and life-saving information as we participate in a **#HashtagLunchbag** service project with some of our finest men and women in blue.

Then, while elementary school-aged students complete the service project, middle and high school students, and parents are invited to join a **conversation with Lieutenant Chris Cuff about ways to engage with police.**

Lieutenant Cuff is currently assigned as the Investigations Bureau Commander which includes supervision of all detectives, gang investigators, the undercover detail, school resource officers, and mental health evaluation teams. A father of three in local independent schools, Lieutenant Cuff is a certified Krav Maga instructor, a trainer in personal, family, and business safety, and routinely gives lectures in police community relations.

PSV Social: Sunday, September 22

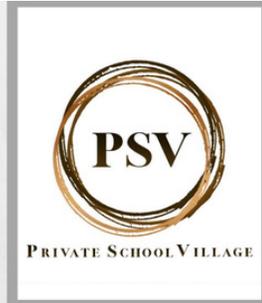
3:00 pm - 6:00 pm

Campbell Hall Lower Gym
(4533 Laurel Canyon Blvd, Studio City)

3:00pm - 4:30pm: Service Project (for all)

4:30pm - 6:00pm: Conversation and Q&A with
Lieutenant Chris Cuff (for middle &
high school students & parents)

*Pizza will be provided at 3 pm



RSVP by Sept. 17
www.privateschoolvillage.org/psv-events

CANDID CONVERSATIONS

Thursday, July 23 at 5 pm - 6 pm PT

Dealing with the N Word

When and how should we teach our children about the N word? Do you know the history of this word? What's the latest thinking around who gets to use it or give/get a "pass?" How can we better educate our school communities and create ways to protect our children when/if they have an N word encounter at school?

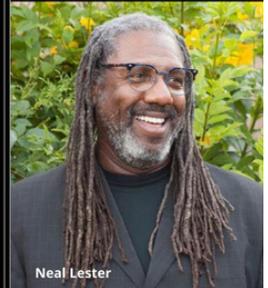
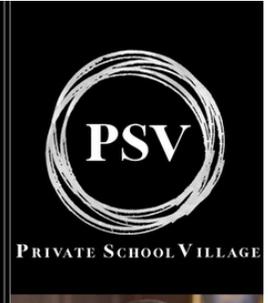
Parents, teachers, administrators, and co-conspirators, please join PSV Parent Ambassador Lauren Lake as she moderates a virtual discussion with

- **Dr. Elizabeth Stordeur Pryor**, Associate Professor of History at Smith College, Smith College Sherrerd Center Teaching Mentor for Equitable and Inclusive Pedagogies, and Author, *Colored Travelers: Mobility and the Fight for Citizenship before the Civil War* and
- **Dr. Neal A. Lester**, Foundation Professor of English and Founding Director of Project Humanities at Arizona State University. A national voice on issues related to the N word and American race relations, Dr. Lester created and taught the first undergraduate course on the N word in the country.

RSVP: PRIVATESCHOOLVILLAGE.ORG

Submit questions for panelists via RSVP or by emailing PSVAdmin@privateschoolvillage.org

Please know that this event, like all PSV events, is designed to provide participants with information we think is helpful. It is not designed to be comprehensive, as an endorsement, or to serve as a definitive, expert perspective.



CANDID CONVERSATIONS

Tuesday, August 4 at 5 pm - 6 pm PT
Affinity Groups & Best Practices

Are you interested in learning more about affinity groups in schools? How do you ensure they are impactful and sustain family matriculation? Is there a difference between groups for elementary versus groups for secondary? What are some best practices around creating and managing a successful affinity group?

Parents, teachers and administrators are invited to join PSV for an informative discussion with:

- **Rosetta Eun Ryong Lee**, Faculty & Outreach Specialist, Seattle Girls' School
- **Gina Parker Collins**, Founder, Advisor & Parent Leader, RIISE - Resources In Independent School Education

RSVP: PRIVATESCHOOLVILLAGE.ORG

Submit questions for panelists in advance via
RSVP or by emailing
PSVAdmin@privateschoolvillage.org

Please know that this event, like all PSV events, is designed to provide participants with information we think is helpful. It is not designed to be comprehensive, as an endorsement, or to serve as a definitive, expert perspective.



Black Hair, Care & Beauty

Sunday, January 12

3:00 pm - 6:00 pm

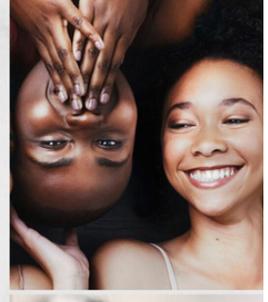
Crossroads School for Arts & Sciences
(Elementary Campus, 1634 18th St, Santa Monica)

How should you respond when someone touches your hair at school? What's the biggest mistake parents make when it comes to caring for hair? Is it too late to learn how to cornrow?

Join us for a panel discussion and conversation about Black hair, care, and beauty! Then, be prepared to practice some basic techniques on hair dolls, your own hair, your child's, or just watch demonstrations. Panelists include:

- Angela C. Styles, Author & Celebrity Hair Stylist
- Renia Green-Editorio, Owner & Stylist, Odessa Renia Salon
- Zenda Walker, Salon Zen
- Quinn Mitchell, Owner & Stylist, 4 The Love of Hair
- Hannah Diop, Founder, Sienna Naturals
- Kenny Hailey, Celebrity Barber
- Linda Rose-Winters, Dir. of DEI Programs, Oakwood School
- Janine Hancock Jones, Director of DEI/Associate Dir. of Admission, Harvard-Westlake School

Please bring your own hair brushes, combs, and tools if you're planning on practicing on your own hair or your child's. Please also know that this event, like all PSV events, is designed to provide participants with information we think is helpful. It is not designed to be comprehensive, as an endorsement, or to serve as a definitive, expert perspective.



Addendum D continued: PSV Program/Event Flyers

2nd Class Offering



Sun., Oct 25 -- Sun., Dec 20 at 2 pm PT

Black History From a Decolonized Perspective (African American History) (6th, 7th & 8th Grade Students)

In this 8-week, 40-minute Outschool class, PSV students will learn about black history beginning with Ancient African kingdoms & societies.

Most Eurocentric curricula begin African American history with their enslavement, completely leaving out the rich cultural history many Africans had in their own societies. By teaching students about history pre-slavery, we build a deeper respect and self-confidence in black children.

Note: Cameras required to be turned on during the class; Discussion based with light homework. Class size limited to 15. PSV Cost: \$65/student.

Learn More & Register: www.privateschoolvillage.org



JOIN US

VIRTUAL BOOK READING & DISCUSSION WITH 16-YEAR OLD AUTHOR, OLIVIA V.G. CLARKE (FOR MIDDLE/HIGH SCHOOL GIRLS)

Sat., Nov 14 | 1:30 PM PT

RSVP and receive a PSV-gifted copy of Black Girl, White School: Thriving, Surviving and No, You Can't Touch My Hair & the accompanying journal (while supplies last).

RSVP AT WWW.PRIVATESCHOOLVILLAGE.ORG

EMERGING REALITIES

How are schools evolving because of what they have experienced and learned during this time of physical distancing?

What are the most pressing things on the minds of trustees? Given the social and civic unrest, how can schools best support all families in the school community?

Join **Reveta Bowers**, retired Head of School at The Center for Early Education, and **Cathy Shelburne**, Director of Professional Development at California Association of Independent Schools, for an informative discussion about the new realities facing independent schools.

MONDAY, JUNE 29 | 7 PM PT

RSVP: PRIVATESCHOOLVILLAGE.ORG

Submit questions for panelists in advance via RSVP or by emailing PSVAdmin@privateschoolvillage.org

Please know that this event, like all PSV events, is designed to provide participants with information we think is helpful. It is not designed to be comprehensive, as an endorsement, or to serve as a definitive, expert perspective.



PRIVATE SCHOOL VILLAGE



Reveta Bowers



Cathy Shelburne

Black Lives Matter @ School

Join Dr. Jamila Lyiscott for a three-part series of powerful conversations about what it means to be young, gifted and Black in private/independent school. Through interactive discussions and fun exercises, "Dr. J" will help students understand their experience, find their voice & learn more about youth activism in the school setting. For 5th & 6th Grade Students. Cost: \$120/student* Space is Limited.

9 am - 10 am PT
Sept 12, Sept 26 & October 3

RSVP by Sept 10 www.privateschoolvillage.org
*Scholarships Available



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