

## LWSD Equity Case Study: Events at Eastlake High School Leading up to 9/11/21

### Introduction:

The following is an examination of the events leading to the controversy at Eastlake High School around 9/11/21. These events caused and continue to cause great harm to BIPOC students and staff. This is an example of situations that happen in schools across the district and missed opportunities for district leadership to support building staff and the BIPOC community. These events illustrate why the district needs a) an equity policy at board level, which it did not have until very recently; b) a bold anti-racist administrative equity policy crafted with the help of BIPOC stakeholders; c) district-level and administrative support for building level equity teams, which involve BIPOC students, families, and staff.

### Timeline with Commentary:

Monday, 9/6/21: Labor Day, no school

Tuesday, 9/7/21: Student leadership class announces Red, White & Blue theme for Friday, with the expectation of a home football game Friday night.

*Actively pursuing racially diverse perspectives in all aspects of leadership - both with staff and students - is foundational in learning from this experience. It's equally important to listen to and respect those voices. The flag and its history, just like the national anthem, have deeply painful roots for many people in our country. Regardless of the upcoming 9/11 memorial, there should be a robust discussion about what a "Patriot Day" or "Red, White & Blue Day" means and if that's the appropriate way to demonstrate true patriotism. This is a learning opportunity, one full of nuance and history, and one that should be taught by voices and stories of people of color. There is an opportunity here to actively pursue anti-racist curriculum.*

Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday: Several simultaneous discussions are happening, most informally.

- There is a realization that the school does not have a plan for teaching about and memorializing 9/11; there is a push starting on 9/9 from an

unofficial school account that most students follow to link the RW&B theme to 9/11.

- Some students & teachers, particularly students and teachers of color, point out to school officials how harmful a “Patriot Day” tribute to 9/11 is, especially for anyone whose family has experienced Islamophobia.
- A group of white parents and students begin to treat any possible cancellation of Patriot Day as reverse racism and an infringement of their 1st Amendment rights. These misguided arguments take hold on social media.

*This week, given the informal conversations swirling around the school, engaging students and families in meaningful discussion around this issue would have been useful. This is an opportunity for building-level equity teams, which are important and should be supported by the district, to step in as a bridge between families and school. The district has determined the expectations for building-level equity teams, which were surely not met here:*

- *Intentional family engagement and community outreach that is increasingly culturally responsive at the district and school level*

- *Increasing student voice, especially for historically under-served or marginalized groups, through community events, focus group work, classroom learning, and problem-solving engagements*

*(<https://www.lwsd.org/programs-and-services/equity-family-engagement>)*

*Why was the Muslim Student Association not included in discussions during this week or related to the controversy unfolding? Those students’ voices need to be heard in order to understand the full impact of 9/11 and to begin to understand the intersectionality for many people that exists between being Muslim and being Black or Brown. The Black Student Union could have been another source for increasing nondominant voices around this situation.*

Friday, 9/10/21:

- The football game, due to a last minute change in opponent, is moved to an away game at Rainier Valley.
- Patriot Day is changed to EHS Spirit Day and an announcement is made at 9:00am, as students are moving from class-to-class. (Students report not hearing or understanding the announcement.)

*This was an opportunity to explain the decision to students, families, and staff using an anti-racist perspective and an equity lens. Instead, by seeming to be afraid to embrace and support the decision, it undercut the validity of the decision.*

Monday, 9/13/21:

- Some media outlets have picked up the story over the weekend, focusing on a racist narrative, using anonymous (and attributed) quotes from students and parents, possibly obtained through interviews or social media.
- Threats are made to the school and staff; the school is in partial lockdown, with increased security.
- Some students wear red, white and blue or American flags to protest what had happened.
- Dr. Holmen sends a district-wide [message](#) regarding the events at EHS, as well as the subsequent media coverage and threats.

*The statement made at district level centered administration, tried to cater to white comfort and white fragility, and did not clearly explain the anti-racist perspective that was behind the original decision.*

*Dr. Holmen's message emphasizes "building bridges." But it does not seem that those bridges are going to be built with students and staff that were concerned by the concept of "Patriot Day" or that wanted a more nuanced discussion of memorializing 9/11; instead those bridges sound like a way of placating the part of the community that was blaming Black and Brown students for being too "sensitive" and claiming their rights were infringed upon. This undercuts the equity work happening at EHS and in the district. This leaves the BIPOC staff and students feeling unsupported.*

*In accepting systemic white supremacy over the needs of Black and Brown students, families, and staff, the district essentially put*

*students and staff in more danger by adding to the reverse racism narrative. And, of course, in such situations, students and staff of color are far more likely to be targeted, so that the very groups meant to be protected by the original decision were left unsupported, targeted, and endangered. The intentions, at every step along the way, might have been good, but the outcomes are what matter and the outcomes upheld systemic racism.*

*It must also be noted that increased security on a school campus is also problematic for students of color since BIPOC students (as well as neurodiverse students and LGBTQ+ students) are disproportionately impacted by police presence in school.*

**Tuesday, 9/14/21:**

- **Principal Bede sends a message to the EHS community.**

*Principal Bede has demonstrated a commitment to becoming more anti racist and in leading the effort at EHS to deliver more equity. However, his message regarding this event misguidedly centers administrators, caters to white fragility, and places blame on specific staff. Building staff, at EHS and in every school, need reliable district support for taking courageous anti-racist stances.*

*There is mention of making sure that all students have a chance to “process” this event, but, other than in the leadership class, students are reporting no other outreach or support has been offered.*

*The EHS Equity Team has objectives for this year that include:*

- *Educate students about racial and social justice in a guaranteed and viable curriculum*
- *Strengthen student leadership around creating a more equitable school*
- *Support and celebrate various cultures at Eastlake*

- *Educate community about racial and social justice*
- *Strengthen Administration's leadership around equity at Eastlake*
- *Build teachers awareness and skills to recognize and address issues of racism at school*  
(<https://ehs.lwgsd.org/studentsfamilies/ehs-racial-equity-team>)

*It is safe to say that not a single one of these objectives was met by the school staff or administration in this situation, and for a school that has prided itself on working on equity for years and for being an equity leader, that is not acceptable. There must be some accountability for those who have had ongoing training and opportunity to learn and grow but who continue to make the same harmful and traumatic mistakes. It is the Black and Brown students at EHS and in other schools who suffer from the lack of adults' accountability.*

**\*\*End of the timeline: No other discussion or outreach, at the school or district level, has happened since the 13th. Students have reported that teachers were specifically asked *not* to discuss the situation in class. Avoidance of conversations about white supremacy ensures it perpetuates throughout our school district.**

### **Conclusion:**

**After reviewing the handling of events at EHS, the first recommendation that must be made is to request support for BIPOC students and staff who feel unsupported in this situation and in the current school climate. The equity goals and objectives of the school and the district are meaningless if BIPOC students and staff are being harmed in the LWSD.**

**This case study demonstrates that the following pieces need to be part of the administrative equity policy for LWSD:**

- **Hiring and retaining racially, ethnically, culturally, and gender diverse staff, including at the administrative level;**

- **Recognizing when a school decision has equity repercussions and making decisions that are anti-racist and equitable, despite discomfort or disagreement from the community or staff;**
- **Developing a clear and streamlined method for building staff to seek and receive support from the district on decisions with equity implications;**
- **Actively pursuing anti-racist curriculum;**
- **Engaging students and families in the learning and educational environment in a meaningful way;**
- **Educate community about racial and social justice;**
- **Emphasizing academic and participation outcomes, not intentions, are the measures of success**
- **Providing ongoing anti-racism/anti-bias training for all staff, including administration and board directors;**
- **Providing the opportunity for all volunteers in positions of authority, such as PTA members, club organizers, etc., also to receive anti-racism/anti-bias training;**
- **Addressing the racial gap in discipline tactics, including the policing of schools, allowing all students to thrive as children.**
- **Actively supporting and engaging building-level parent, student, staff equity teams in a meaningful way. Creating accountability for those teams;**
- **Allocating resources in a way that creates equity.**

**We hope you agree there is an opportunity to learn from these recent events and to do better. Thank you for your attention to our concerns.**

**LWSD Equity Now**

**References:**

**EHS Equity Team Page:**

<https://ehs.lwsd.org/studentsfamilies/ehs-racial-equity-team>

**Fox News:**

<https://www.foxnews.com/sports/washington-state-hs-calls-off-9-11-football-tribute-because-some-could-be-offended-report-says>

**LWSD Equity & Family Engagement:**

<https://www.lwsd.org/programs-and-services/equity-family-engagement>

**Rantz:**

<https://mynorthwest.com/3141211/rantz-high-school-cancels-9-11-tribute-says-it-could-offend-some-students/>

**Sammamish Independent:**

<https://sammamishindependent.com/2021/09/eastlake-patriot-day-flap-started-with-an-innocent-decision/amp/>

**Two Decades After 9/11, Muslim Americans Still Fighting Bias:**

<https://apnews.com/article/September-11-Muslim-Americans-93f97dd9219c25371428f4268a2b33b4>