

Fieldston Students of Color Demand Action against Bias, Bigotry, and Racism on Campus

A Spark to Action:

After the public discovery of videos featuring a number of Fieldston high school students using racist, homophobic, and misogynistic language in a hateful and targeted way, Fieldston's culture of bias and hate towards students of color and other marginalized groups became undeniably clear to the entire community. While the videos themselves and the questionable disciplinary decisions that followed have caused much pain and suffering for students of color, our focus now is to confront the racism and intolerance within our community that has allowed such hate to manifest itself. Because such behavior is not exclusive to the Ethical Culture Fieldston School, we call upon students, families, and educators everywhere to support our call for action.

While Fieldston prides itself on its dedication to diversity, ethics, and progressivism, it has failed to eliminate the emotional trauma and harassment faced by its students of color and other marginalized groups daily. Our struggle today is not only for ourselves but for the students who came before us and the students to come. Now is the time for us to step up and demand change.

Our lock-out is a peaceful protest of our institution's failure to adequately acknowledge and address systemic bias, bigotry, and racism at ECFS. We have intentionally chosen to lock out Fieldston's administrative building, using only our bodies as barricades, as a means of forcing the Board of Trustees and our administration to purposefully work with us to address our demands. For too long, reform surrounding these issues has been left unprioritized. We are no longer willing to let the necessary changes be pushed to the sidelines.

Therefore, we ask you, our administration, our classmates, our families, our alumni, and our community: *Will you join us in our struggle or sit back and watch?*

4 Demands for Immediate Action in Light of Recent Incidents

Fieldston's Student Handbook states that the administration is responsible for enforcing the Code of Conduct "with consistency, fairness, firmness and politeness." Under the Code of Conduct, harassment is a major offense and is defined as ". . . offensive behavior that intimidates or demeans an individual or group based upon . . . race" With respect to the recent events, ECFS' administration has failed to enforce the rules and regulations pertaining to harassment under Fieldston's Code of Conduct and, as a result, is perpetuating the harm and discomfort of Fieldston students.

The videos in question displaying classmates using racist, homophobic, and misogynistic language have irreparably harmed students within the community. In the recent disciplinary process, the administration failed to include the testimony of the students most affected by these violations and has continued the harassment of the general student body through the announcement of the implicated students' pending return to the community. Furthermore, the disciplinary process has yet to provide its mandatory briefing on the conduct and punishment, a grave deviation from our institution's norms.

Students of color regularly face incidents of microaggressions and racial bias on campus. Some incidents are brought to the administration and faculty, while others are not. Some incidents are addressed privately, while others fail to receive any acknowledgment. This includes campus security exclusively stopping students of color for their i.d.'s, reported incidents of students posting the N-word online, and students wearing clothing that mocks other cultures, such as Native American headdresses. In the vast majority of these instances, the administration's responses have been routinely underwhelming and delayed.

In reference to the previously stated, we demand that the ECFS administration immediately examine and adhere to the following:

- 1. Release the official disciplinary decision, as is common practice after the Disciplinary Committee has convened.** It is imperative that students and families understand what decision was made in order to prevent speculation and allow our community to begin a proper healing process. Additionally, we demand a clear timeline for how and when students in the videos will return to the community and that a clear transition plan is in place to avoid further trauma to our community.
- 2. We demand a written apology from each of the students involved in the videos.** Additionally, we require a weekly public and written reflection from the students involved regarding their progress and development for the remainder of the year. We believe students should have the opportunity to redeem themselves; however, this is not possible without their commitment to self-improvement. Students of color and white allies who feel comfortable are willing to engage with the involved students to foster growth in our community, which can only be achieved through clear communication.
- 3. Ensure that the victimized seniors of color are given leniency for missed classes due to the emotional trauma resulting from this incident of harassment.**
- 4. Conduct a more global investigation into the systemic nature of racism at ECFS - specifically looking into the assorted incidents of bias that have occurred.**

Agreeing to these demands is the only immediate way to rectify the administration's long-term failure to adequately enforce the rules and regulations outlined in Fieldston's Student Handbook and restore a feeling of safety on campus for all students.

16 Demands for Immediate Long-Term Improvements at ECFS

United in our campaign, #studentsofcolormatter, our demands aim to initiate long-term improvements within the present-day Fieldston community.

1. **Changes to the Disciplinary Committee (DC) at Fieldston:** We demand the permanent members of the Disciplinary Committee (DC) propose the following amendments to the DC procedures which can then be ratified by a majority vote from student government as outlined in the Fieldston Student Handbook:
 - a. Implement clear consequences for the use of slurs and derogatory language. Without definite consequences, students believe their use of such language will go unpunished.
 - b. Provide the ability for students to represent themselves in the DC meetings pertaining to incidents in which they are directly targeted.
 - c. Implement a disciplinary process for students who were accomplices to incidents that go before the DC (ie. if a student records a video or is complicit or complacent in a problematic situation they must also go in front of the DC). Our culture of bias towards students of color and other marginalized groups is largely caused by students' unwillingness to stand up to problematic language and actions. We must force our community to hold each other accountable.

2. **Student Representation on the ECFS Board:** We demand the Board of Trustees allocate two seats for student representatives. Our Board of Trustees holds immense power at our institution, yet its composition and agenda are unknown to the student body. In an attempt to increase transparency and communication we feel it is important that two students be allowed to sit in on board meetings to represent student concerns and communicate the Board's agenda to the rest of the student body. The two students will be nominated in a special election at the end of their sophomore year, serving from the beginning of their junior year until their graduation. *We understand legal concerns of confidentiality on the Board and therefore do not expect our representatives to sit in on certain conversations.*

3. **Racial Bias Training:** We demand that all faculty, staff and administrators attend racial bias training yearly from an organizations like Courageous Conversations. These programs engage entire communities and foster the positive transformation of beliefs and actions so "people of all races can achieve at their highest levels and live their most empowered and powerful lives."

4. **Hiring More Faculty of Color:** We demand more faculty of color be hired in all departments. Hiring more faculty of color is notably important as we work to diversify our curriculum because students should learn the history and literature of POC from POC. Additionally, we specifically demand that each respective department chair commit to hiring more faculty of color. While much of the systemic improvements fall on the shoulders of the higher levels of the administration, other members of our community have a unique power. We call on individual department chairs to use theirs.
5. **Attrition Data:** We demand that the administration provide the community with data on the attrition rates of teachers and administrators of color. If this data is not currently available, we demand that the school begin collecting it.
6. **Recruit and Retain more Students of Color:** We demand that the administration commits to recruiting and retaining more students of color. By maintaining a low number of students of color, specifically black and Latinx students, ECFS continues to reinforce a racial hierarchy.
7. **Data on Biased Incidents on Campus:** We demand that the school provide data on previous disciplinary decisions regarding the use of racial and derogatory slurs including, but not limited to homophobic, sexist and racist language. It is crucial that there is a public understanding and record of how our school has dealt with such incidents in the past in order to acknowledge how we can better handle them in the future.
8. **High School Diversity Requirements:** We demand the implementation of diversity requirements, beginning with the Class of 2023, that require juniors and seniors to take at least one history and one English elective that focuses on the histories and writings of people of marginalized identities. Including, but not limited to, African-American Literature, Asian-American Literature, Latin America and Caribbean Literature, Contemporary Black Society, African Studies, Revolución, Queer Literature, and the History of Sexualities in America.

*Disclaimer: We acknowledge the problematic nature of labeling this a “diversity requirement.”

“White Privilege is your history being the core curriculum and mine being taught as an elective.”

9. **Indigenous History and English Electives:** We demand the development and implementation of indigenous history and English electives and intentional incorporation of indigenous history and literature into the mandatory curriculum. Additionally, we demand that the problematic nature of how indigenous culture and history is taught at Fieldston Lower and Ethical Culture (i.e the wearing of headdresses and the teaching of “Native-American chants”) be examined and changed.

10. Mandatory Black Studies Course: We demand the creation and implementation of a mandatory Black Studies Course, where all students are required to develop a historical understanding of the ways in which African Americans have been systematically oppressed since the end of the Civil War. Such oppressions include, but are not limited to, physical segregation, social isolation, unjust mass incarceration, and the systematic denial of wealth and property. We believe all students leaving this institution must understand how racism is systemic and institutionalized, and how it's been enforced and maintained by government programs and policies. We also believe that all students must learn about African Americans' many cultural, political, social, and scientific contributions, even in the face of the utmost brutality and violence. Some racially charged incidents on our campus, including the frequent use of the n-word by our white counterparts, are due to a lack of empathy, understanding, and appreciation for black and African American history. In this course, students will learn about the history of the n-word and the historical and social implications of using such a word, and non-black students will have to acknowledge the ways in which they maintain and benefit from such oppression.

11. Bias Training for Parents: We demand that the P+T (ECFS's Parent Association) sponsor mandatory racial bias training for ALL parents with students in kindergarten, 6th and 9th grades in order to better the community. Although it may seem like a cumbersome request we believe that because of our institution's dedication to ethics and diversity, Fieldston is obligated to find families who are willing to better themselves and the community. Requiring families to attend one to three training sessions over the course of many years is a reasonable requirement.

12. Establishing Mandatory Racial Affinity Groups: We demand mandatory racial affinity groups in Fieldston Lower and Ethical Culture starting in 1st Grade. As students of color, we become cognizant of race at a very early age. For us, it is impossible to avoid our racial identities in a world that prioritizes and values whiteness above all else. For this reason, from a young age, students of color struggle with race and identity, especially in predominantly white spaces like Fieldston. Affinity groups would drastically improve the experience of both students of color and white students. White students would directly benefit from affinity groups as it would allow them to develop a foundation for understanding their racial presence and overall identity in the world.

13. End Racial Profiling on Campus: We demand the Safety and Security policies be revised to prevent racial profiling of students and parents of color. While the Fieldston Student Government has already worked with the administration to rectify the deficits, the policies remain problematic. In particular, the lack of procedure for cases when an officer does not recognize a student. This gap in policy has led to the continued stopping and harassment of multiple students of color.

14. **Hiring of an Ombudsperson:** We demand the hiring of an ombudsperson on campus to allow students and faculty to speak freely to a neutral arbiter without fear of retaliation.

15. **Protection of Faculty for Speaking Out:** Our faculty should not face any unwarranted retribution for speaking freely in support of students. Fieldston faculty, especially our faculty of color, constantly advise us on academic struggles and social concerns and aid us in navigating life in a predominantly white institution. Most students of color, would not still be at Fieldston without the consistent support and advocacy from our teachers and faculty of color. While many of our faculty of color want to support us during times like these, many are limited by valid and legitimate fears of punishment and termination from the administration. Whether directly stated or subtly implied, fear-mongering is unacceptable from an administration that values progressive learning and teachers' rights. We demand that you officially state that faculty who speak freely in support of any marginalized students will not be punished.

16. **Implement a New Reporting System:** We demand the development and implementation of a reporting system for all incidents of bias, bigotry, and racism on campus. All incidents, regardless of physical evidentiary support, must be recorded. In light of recent events, it has become clear that these are not isolated incidents. Derogatory language and intentionally harmful behavior are rampant within our community; the absence of a system for reporting and recording these incidents means many of the students involved go unpunished.

In Closing, we find it necessary to clarify to whom our demands are intended: the ECFS Board of Trustees, the Head of School and the Assistant Heads of School. While the problems we seek to reform are institutional faults, we believe the individuals in these positions must be held accountable for the institution's failure to enact meaningful change. Since the 1950s, Fieldston students have sat-in, locked-out and protested this failure. We are here again to ask our entire community of students, faculty, parents, alumni and the press to hold the Board of Trustees and higher administration accountable for addressing all of our demands and creating meaningful change. The pain and suffering of students of color at the ECFS is real. Believe us and support us.