



Ketchikan Gateway Borough School District

333 Schoenbar Rd. • Ketchikan, Alaska 99901

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Statement

Findings

The Ketchikan Gateway Borough School District (KGBSD) has conducted an investigation into the events and circumstances surrounding the February 5, 2022 basketball game at Ketchikan High School. The incident sparked outcry from our community members and neighbors, both regionally and statewide, as a result of the alleged racially insensitive theme of the pep club and reports of derogatory remarks by its members.

For decades Ketchikan High School's pep club has planned themed outfits for home basketball games as a way to show school spirit. The weekend's games were held with Metlakatla as the opposing team. The theme on February 4th was "construction" and the theme on February 5th was "country." For the "country" theme students dressed in outfits that included plaid shirts and cowboy hats. This led to an association with a "Cowboys vs. Indians" theme.

This association was foreseeable given the fact that Ketchikan was playing the only native reservation in the state of Alaska and the Metlakatla team consists primarily of Native Alaskan students. While the District's investigation revealed that there was no intention by the school or pep club student leadership to be racially provocative or insensitive with the country theme, the negative impact of the theme to our communities was predictable and should have been prevented. For this we must take accountability..

Furthermore, the investigation revealed that the situation was escalated by a few individual Ketchikan students' behavior at the game, which included inappropriate racist remarks and sounds directed toward the opposing team. These behaviors violated the Ketchikan High School code of conduct and Board Policy, and have been handled according to the District's student disciplinary policy. However, the students alone do not bear the full responsibility. The pep club and the student spectators at the game should have engaged in the hospitality we know they are capable of and have demonstrated on many other occasions, but it should be noted that they also lacked adult guidance and adequate administrative oversight. For this we must also take accountability.

Apologies

In reflecting on these events, KGBSD recognizes that we must apologize in a meaningful way and take full responsibility.

We must acknowledge that, even if not intended, the actions of our students were hurtful to our guests from Metlakatla. We sincerely apologize to the Metlakatla students, coaches, parents, school district



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and community as a whole for creating an environment that did not honor you as our valued neighbors, friends, and family. We did not demonstrate the kind of hospitality and respect that we would want extended to our own students and community members, and for this we are deeply sorry.

Furthermore, we recognize that these events also hurt our own students and community members. Ketchikan's Native community was devalued and our students experienced mistreatment by their peers and others in the wake of the incident. Additionally, students who were committed to maintaining positive and appropriate behaviors have been implicated alongside the few who misbehaved. We apologize to our students, coaches, parents, teachers, and community members for failing to uphold our mission of fostering meaningful connections and nurturing environments for all of our students.

Lastly, we apologize to the Native community in our region and across the State of Alaska. Whether or not there was intention to harm is immaterial; harm was caused nonetheless. As American journalist Charles Blow has said, "Doing harm does not require malice or intent. The absence of empathy and understanding are sufficient." We acknowledge that our actions were not sensitive nor displayed empathy and understanding of the historical and ongoing hardships of our Native community members.

We understand that this incident has not happened in a vacuum and there is intense national political discord around these topics that cause some to feel we should not address them. But to fail to do so would further fail our neighbors in Metlakatla, our students, and community. Our students are already leading us with their desire to make things right between us and Metlakatla, so let's follow their lead. If we can't hold ourselves accountable, how do we expect to help our students grow into the leaders, critical thinkers, and problem solvers we envision them to be?

Racism, in all forms, is unacceptable and will not be tolerated. As painful as this incident and ensuing repercussions have been, it presents an opportunity to learn, heal, and grow as a community that supports the thriving of ALL students.

To do so, we must gain greater understanding of the historical and present dynamics within our communities, and the ways in which specific groups have been marginalized, misrepresented, discriminated against and otherwise mistreated. Alaska is home to 229 of the 574 federally recognized tribes in the United States—more than any other state. Nearly one-third of our students are Alaska Native or American Indian. Our school and community is situated within Lingít Aaní, the home of the Tlingit, Haida, and Tsimshian people who have stewarded these lands for thousands of years. We owe it to ourselves, our students, and our communities to do better.

KGBSD must work to restore safety and trust by taking actionable steps toward a greater understanding of racial equity in our community.



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Action Plan

As educators, we understand that great challenges can produce the most pivotal lessons in life. As many have said, this is a teachable moment. It is a moment for us to take stock of our relationships as students, parents, schools, and community members, and to extend the kind of empathy, understanding, hospitality, and generosity we all deserve. It is a moment for KGBSD to focus on repairing our relationships, understanding the impact of our actions, and welcoming the opportunity for growth. Therefore, KGBSD will be taking the following steps:

- Immediately institute a plan for school theme selection (i.e. pep club, spirit week, assemblies, etc.) that thoughtfully considers culture, race, and gender impacts
- Immediately implement a sportsmanship agreement that outlines expectations for Ketchikan student spectator conduct, with zero tolerance for hateful speech
- Conduct a racial equity audit of District policies
- Consult First Alaskans Institute (FAI) as advisors in the District's action plan for training and professional development related to racial equity and healing; and
- Co-create a Racial Equity Strategic Plan to accomplish short, mid, and long-term goals with key stakeholders

Immediate action is needed to address the gaps that allowed this incident to happen. We commit ourselves to doing this important work and will use this incident as a learning experience for the good of all of our students. We apologize and will do better moving forward.

Ketchikan Gateway Borough School Board and District Administration