



# Black Students Demanding Change

[Home](#) [Our Demands](#) [Our Team](#)



## Our Demands

Recognizing the urgency of addressing ongoing racial inequity across independent schools throughout the nation, Black Students Demanding Change (BSDC) is dedicated to making our schools actively anti-racist communities. Our mission statement is as follows:

BSDC is dedicated to fostering a centralized community space where Black students feel heard, supported, and celebrated. We work to implement racially equitable reform in private schools across the US. by serving as an intermediary between Black students and our administrations. Our platform amplifies the voices of our peers by translating concerns and ideas into actionable steps to make our institutions actively anti-racist and authentically inclusive, thus improving the educational experience for all students. We aim to work in concert with our administrations to implement changes, ensuring accountability and transparency along the way.

During the past two weeks, we sent letters to our respective administrations/boards introducing BSDC and outlining a series of demands born out of the pain we have experienced at our schools. Our letters catered to the specific needs of students at each school. Now, in the spirit of maintaining transparency and clarity, we are putting forth a set of collective demands, which more broadly encapsulate BSDC's vision. These demands reflect feedback we received on Instagram and from student representatives. **The call for change from students at schools across the nation demonstrates that racial inequity is not unique to any one school. Our outcry is indicative of a need for systemic reform across educational institutions in America.** We categorize the racially equitable reform we envision under the acronym CARES:

**Culture:** Implement changes that promote an actively anti-racist, supportive, and self-challenging community.

**Accountability:** Establish structures that lead schools to take ownership for executing racially equitable reform and hold individuals accountable for racist behavior.

**Representation:** Create student, faculty, administrative, and board bodies that comprise racially diverse members.

**Education:** Adapt curricular and pedagogical approaches to ensure a more holistic learning experience that prominently includes the cultures and histories of BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color).

**Support:** Recruit administrators and faculty such as guidance counselors and mentors who support BIPOC students and all faculty.

A complete set of demands under the BSDC CARES. framework follows this letter.

**While we have already received pledges of support from a number of our administrations, we now call upon all represented schools to commit to fulfilling our demands. As advocates for equity for all students, we must create a new standard to which all educational institutions hold themselves.** As such, we release this letter to accompany a petition, which we will use to demonstrate support and create traction with our administrations. We urge our peers, families, teachers, allies, and

administrators to sign, share, and repost our petition. Furthermore, we ask heads of schools across the city to hold each other accountable for doing what is necessary to make all students feel a genuine sense of safety and belonging at their schools.

**In solidarity and partnership,**

**Black Students Demanding Change**

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#### **BSDC CARES.**

Our collective demands for racially equitable reform fall under a single BSDC framework under the acronym CARES:

#### **Culture**

- Schools, with the explicit support of their boards, will release public statements to students, parents, faculty, staff, and alumni outlining their earnest commitment to becoming actively anti-racist institutions.
- Schools will foster environments of cultural competency and mutual respect where diverse identities and perspectives are truly welcomed and valued.
- Schools will create environments where students understand the gravity of racially-charged and otherwise offensive language and behavior and know that they will be held accountable for such actions.
- Admissions teams will emphasize schools' commitment to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) and desire to recruit families whose values align in this regard. These efforts will be actualized in marketing materials, commitment letters, enrollment contracts, and through verbal dialogue with prospective families and placement officers.
- If no such groups currently exist, schools will create racial affinity spaces for Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) students. If facilitators are deemed necessary, they will be members of the faculty who identify with that affinity space.
- Multiple mandatory Community & Diversity Days will be conducted throughout the year. The curricula will be student-led and centered around student feedback to ensure the content will be varied and enriching.
- Schools will evaluate their display of BIPOC students on websites and promotional items and events, taking care to prevent tokenism.

#### **Accountability**

- Accountability and commitment to these changes must begin at the board and leadership levels. If no such groups exist, boards will create DEI committees so that all board efforts are examined through a DEI lens.
- Boards will hold their administrators accountable for creating anti-racist reform at their schools.
- Schools will outline a clear plan detailing their commitment to fulfilling these demands and include a schedule of completion.
- Schools will develop approaches to measure both the success of the implementation of these demands and their overall effectiveness in creating anti-racist communities. Schools will maintain complete transparency and frequent communication regarding their efforts, results, and next steps.
- Schools will update their codes of conduct with a section explicitly addressing racially motivated offenses and patterns of racist behavior. Standardized procedures will be established in order to ensure age-appropriate and equitable consequences and to eliminate the opportunity for impunity. Both students and parents will read and sign code of conduct literature.
  - Victims of racially motivated offenses and their families will have the option to receive support from a school counselor who is trained in racial sensitivity. Schools will offer utmost support.
  - In instances of racially motivated offenses that do not result in expulsion, offenders and their parents will receive mandatory counseling/education on racial sensitivity and the impact of their/their child's offense.
- If no such systems currently exist, schools will implement reporting systems for incidents concerning identity-based bias (e.g. racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, xenophobia, religious prejudice, classism). The process of reporting

offenses will be straightforward and low-risk for students, faculty, staff, and administrators.

- There will be a clause in enrollment contracts emphasizing commitment to DEI. It will be made clear that when parents sign this contract that families (both parents and students) are in support of this commitment.
- Anti-bias training for parents will begin no later than the 2021-2022 school year. Future annual enrollment contracts will require parent participation in anti-bias training at least once each year.
- Students will fill out an annual survey regarding teachers, coaches, advisors, counselors, administrators, peer culture, and curriculum. Survey questions will pertain to issues of bias, sensitivity, and cultural competency (e.g. the ability to teach, discuss, and handle situations concerning race and bias in and outside of the classroom). Schools will share and respond to survey feedback, outlining steps to address concerns.
- Schools will update their faculty handbooks with a section explicitly addressing racially motivated offenses and patterns of racist behavior. Standardized procedures will be established in order to ensure just consequences and to eliminate the opportunity for impunity. Faculty will read and sign this handbook as a condition for their employment.
- If a faculty member, staff person, or administrator demonstrates a pattern of racism or racial insensitivity, their employment will be reconsidered. If the employee is retained, the school will release a transparent statement justifying its decision and indicating how the employee will be held accountable and retrained.
- All board members, administrators, faculty, and students will be provided with annual anti-racist and anti-bias required summer reading lists. Topics will include but are not limited to: institutional racism, the impact of micro-aggressions, what it means to be anti-bias and anti-racist, classroom practices that promote inclusion, topics related to the accomplishments of BIPOC. Schools will create forums that hold discussions based upon this reading.

## Representation

- If no such role currently exists, schools will hire at least one administrator dedicated to DEI initiatives.
- Schools will commit to recruiting and retaining additional BIPOC to leadership roles such as board, administrative, and department chair positions.
- Schools will commit to recruiting and retaining additional BIPOC faculty.
- Schools will commit to recruiting and retaining additional high achieving BIPOC students who reflect diverse socioeconomic, geographical, and religious backgrounds.
- Schools will establish affinity group representation on student government if there are willing representatives in these spaces.
- College placement offices will strengthen their relationships with representatives and admissions staff at historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) and host on-campus information sessions with the intention of eradicating the stigma around applying to/attending such institutions. Strengthening relationships with HBCUs will serve as an additional option, not as a tracking mechanism for Black students. Furthermore, college placement officers will genuinely support BIPOC students in applying to any school within their abilities and interests.
- Arts departments will equally showcase the contributions of white and non-white artists. In doing so, schools will honor stories where diversity is essential to the plot when choosing to perform plays and musicals.

## Education

- Schools will consider the historiography of their curricula, taking care to prevent the perpetuation of false or partial narratives and the romanticization of painful histories. All curricula will expand their lenses to accurately and justly include all perspectives, particularly BIPOC voices.
- All curricula will be reworked to include BIPOC authors, characters, and figures in a way that not only focuses on their plight, but also highlights their success, excellence, and contributions to society.
- Department heads across all disciplines will have transparent relationships with BSDC representatives, affinity group leaders, and the student body in working to accurately represent BIPOC in curricula.
- When current events have strong racial implications (e.g. the murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor), schools will openly address them community-wide. Humanities classes will have in-depth conversations about them, ensuring that the voices of the affected group are not only listened to, but also prioritized.

- Curricula will be amended to better educate students about the intersections of identity and social issues. Existing courses will be evaluated on whether or not they fulfill that criterion, and schools with this gap in curriculum will oversee the creation of such courses, consulting experts on selecting and teaching courses.
- Comprehensive representation including, but not limited to, the following cultures and racial identities will be embedded across the curricula of all grade levels, with a focus on examining the presence and impact of various forms of racism (institutional, systemic, and interpersonal), and including content that celebrates BIPOC voices.
  - African and African descendent communities including African-American and Caribbean
  - Indigenous/First Nations
  - Latin American, Latinx, and Afro-Latinx
  - East Asian
  - Pacific Islander
  - South Asian
- Existing student leadership seminars and other personal development courses will be updated to include teachings of anti-bias and anti-racism.

### Support

- Schools will recruit more BIPOC faculty in their health and wellness departments to better understand and support the diverse cultural backgrounds of the student body.
- Substantial resources will be devoted to training all faculty members on how to effectively lead race-based discussions and navigate other potentially sensitive social issues in and out of the classroom. In doing so, schools will ensure that BIPOC are not responsible for educating their peers and faculty and speaking on behalf of their communities.
- Schools will take measures to support students during times of racial tension within the nation or school communities, ensuring that BIPOC students do not hold the sole responsibility of de-escalating tense situations.
- Schools will demonstrate support by not only utilizing DEI administrators but also recruiting board members, administrators, and faculty to execute these efforts.
- Schools will conduct outreach to BIPOC students and students on financial aid through surveys and other forums. Moreover, they will respond according to feedback to ensure they feel genuinely safe and included in their school communities.
- In their efforts to recruit and retain additional BIPOC faculty, schools will take specific measures to provide development, mentorship, and advancement opportunities.
- Schools will establish an interdivisional mentoring program for BIPOC students, aimed at allowing younger BIPOC students to see themselves represented and supported at their school.
- Schools will establish support systems in which volunteering BIPOC alumni mentor and develop relationships with current BIPOC students.

**By pledging to meet BSDC's demands under the C.A.R.E.S. framework, schools demonstrate that they, too, CARE about making their communities actively anti-racist and authentically inclusive, thus improving the educational experience for all students. In doing so, academic institutions genuinely fulfill their mission of holistically educating students to become engaged, ethical global leaders.**

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