

PERSONAL STATEMENTS

Student ('18) - "As an Filipino-American woman in your school system, I grew up learning from white teachers about an overwhelmingly white history. As a result, I grew up with the assumption that I could never become a lawyer, and remained uninterested in politics because I simply could not see myself nor anyone like me in any place of power or leadership in history. Furthermore, the diversity organizations in the school system perpetuated divisions despite good intentions, making me feel not Asian enough for an Asian Student Association that excluded peers from membership based on race and muted diverse playlists.

Although I am grateful for my education, and these struggles have shaped the strength of who I am today, they have also wasted years of my life on self-doubt, internalized racism, and silence towards the peers and authorities who have perpetuated racism and who have suffered from unjust discrimination. I cannot even imagine how it would have felt to be a Black student in our school district. To witness the constant death and suffering of people who look like me on the news because of their skin color - and then have it denied again and again not only by the media, but also by the education that erases so much of my history.

In middle school, I was advised not to do a project on Malcolm X because Martin Luther King was presented as an easier alternative - painted as a saint, a hero, an inspiration - and though he was certainly an incredible leader who made a crucial impact in American history, reducing the Civil Rights Movement to one name and one speech is harmful. It takes away the full spectrum of thoughts and actions from a group of people that is already not treated with full humanity.

Not providing that education is harmful. It leaves all students of any race - but especially black students and other students of color - unprepared for the reality we must face as American citizens. It leaves us without the language and knowledge needed to articulate the injustice we witness and experience. I am asking you to make an immediate, drastic change in the Upper Merion education system - to choose to be a leader in this critical historical moment instead of turning your back on justice.

Provide resources to all students on racism - assemblies, pamphlets, websites. Expand history units to include more diverse representation and a COMPLETE coverage of Black history from past to present - not just the Civil Rights Movement. Invite anti-racist speakers, experts on Black history, and speakers encouraging young people to get more involved in politics. We don't need to be rewatching Forrest Gump in AP Euro, we need to be seeing 13th (the Netflix documentary), and it has to be mandatory for all students - not just one session, but frequently throughout the year. And one teacher, one assembly, one unit is not enough - diversity, tolerance, and anti-racism needs to DEFINE our education, and it has to be required of ALL teachers THROUGHOUT AND BEYOND the school year. We need to at the very least educate students on the NAMES of black leaders and black people who were victimized by police brutality.

It is frankly embarrassing that it took me until my second year of college to learn about Malcolm X, Kevin Young, June Jordan, Angela Davis, Assata Shakur, Lauryn Hill, and so many other great Black leaders, artists, and activists. It is astonishing how much of the 13th documentary was shocking to me when I first watched it. It is shameful that I only experienced one Black Lives Matter protest at Upper Merion years ago, and that it was not addressed in class or widely discussed in the district.

Please, please, please. Do better, for the children in your schools and the future of Upper Merion."

Student ('18) - "I recognize my privilege as a non-Black person. While I greatly value the education I received during my 12 years at Upper Merion, I left my K-12 career with the misconception that the Black narrative ended after the 1960s. Looking back, I was so ignorant and aloof to the ongoing systemic racism occurring in the modern day community. I've observed students saying the n-word casually, whether it be through song

lyrics or projected in a teasingly manner to their peers, and also have been brought up in conversation to *degrade* the intelligence of Black people using my Asian American status. This is not acceptable.”

Student (‘18) - “This is a very important message that all incoming and present students must understand so that they are playing an active role in society by contributing to the conversation. There needs to be change now, there’s no time to wait.”

Anonymous - “The BLMM has been developing forever. It’s not new nor shocking but it’s infuriating that we’ve had to fight for basic human rights still. Although this may be the case, the fight must be continued until we are all truly equal. Education is a crucial element of that fight. Educating students not only on what has happened in history but what is happening in current times and the connection between the two is significant for people to understand what is the issue and what could be the solution.”

Student (‘16) - “Please change education. I remember being taught MLK was good and Malcolm X was bad and a little bit about Rosa Parks and that’s it. Education needs to change in Upper Merion.”

Student (‘19) - “I support the change because it is long overdue.”

Student (‘19) - “Throughout my time in Upper Merion, I wished that we had looked deeper into Black American History then just slavery and segregation. There are many other aspects of African American History that should be addressed in the school’s curriculum that display black excellence.”

Anonymous - “As a former student of UMASD I feel like action must be taken. Personally I feel that I was undereducated about the true history of black America. From my time there I can only recall going into depth about black history on or around MLK Day. The education system of UMASD needs to be reformed. There needs to be a more culturally diverse system implemented. The only true diversity I remember from UMASD were the students who went there, and that’s not enough.”

Student (‘20) - “Upper Merion has a lot to do when it comes to educating students on racism and oppression. I remember walking through the halls and hearing racial slurs many times and it was truly heartbreaking how nothing was ever done about it.”

Anonymous - “The amount of racist and ignorant students at upper merion is unbelievable. I’ve heard people say such disgusting things about black people, slurring, stereotyping, straight up discrimination, etc. with no repercussions. The school must do better.”

Student (‘20) - “There is no other option. We must change, we must grow, we must be better.”

Student (‘20) - “Upper Merion needs to recognize the pressing issue at hand and it’s students and faculty need to commit themselves entirely to making effective change, both in the school as well as in the community. We need to make Upper Merion more diverse, inclusive, and embrace black culture as our education is white washed.”

Student (‘20) - “Although Upper Merion’s diversity is what a lot of teachers and students respond as their favorite part of the UM community, the ability to harness that community and catalyze it for better and bigger things is lacking. For example the CP classes are usually white, black, Mexican. Honors and AP classes are filled with students who have economic stability and guidance from their parents. If better counseling and more goal directed initiatives at school were enforced for those less privileged as they lack support at home.

Many miss out on opportunities, lack the motivation, and are looked over by teachers rather than the opposite being done. Truth proper guidance from the school I believe minorities who lack stability and resources from home can also propel and reach higher goals in terms of post graduation.

Another example is students behaviors in the classroom. I have noticed several times if a white student does something disruptive, turns an assignment in late, asks for a grade bump, or says something distasteful most teachers give them a lighter penalty or verbal reprimand than if it was a student of color. Moreover when a whiter student does it it's seen more comedically, while it's not seen as such for black students. For most of these teachers it probably is the underlying bias which is noted in your letter. More awareness of these actions can make it more fair and equal in the classroom.

Whenever we read books a-lot of the time racial struggle as well as the perspectives and interpretations of minorities were brushed over. It seemed as if the romanticized white perspective was also the right way to see a poem, book, novella. The perspectives of those from different origins were not seen as "the correct answer" or 'right interpretation'. Most instructors are not aware nor been exposed to the conflicts and lives that POC and minorities have had. They as teachers are aware of their own lives and education. Even with the 'Give Voice Initiative' one being about racism and police brutality and the other about immigration. Both series were looked at romantically and analytically instead of as real events and circumstances in this country and throughout the world. With this kind of literature we need to take steps to talk about it in the open, address first hand instances, and change our thinking and actions accordingly to improve the world."

Anonymous - "With everything that has been going on surrounding the death of George Floyd, for me, it has brought to light how little we are taught about black history in school. Based on what I have been learning about black history and systematic racism in the past month, it is evident how much these topics are ignored. I believe that Upper Merion is a fairly diverse district compared to surrounding areas and even compared to a majority of Pennsylvania, and I believe Upper Merion can be the place that sparks change in the state. Supporting our black students and community in this way upholds Upper Merion's "community of caring" values and sets an example for other schools in the state."

Student ('19) - "Education should arm us in the battle against ignorance. Going to college made me realize all the lessons I missed out on from high school. We need to do better for the sake of a better community and overall society."

Anonymous - "UM prides itself off of its diversity. We have to do more."

Student ('18) - "Elementary through high school is where diversity education needs to start. We need to eliminate racism before it can begin and before it can find its way into the professional world."

Student ('21) - "The racist remarks made by some of my fellow classmates that I have heard and that have been ignored when told to teachers and staff members is disgusting. UM claims to be a place of diversity and accepting for all, but when students get reported for using slurs that they should not use at school or anywhere for that matter, the school continues to ignore these problems and does not give a punishment to the guilty party. Racism is real and it is in Upper Merion. Wake up."

Anonymous - "This needs to be changed. There is so much racism in those classrooms that should not, and would not be happening, if we had a stronger education and understanding of what is happening, and has happened."

Student ('18) - "From what I can remember of my time throughout my UM education, I can't recall any time where we really honed in on the history of anyone of color in the US. There were small mentions about the use of people of color in the making of this country today, as well as slavery, but I honestly can't tell you that we really focused on any of these subjects to the fullest extent we should have and to the most raw and real accounts of what has taken place. The curriculum might be more whitewashed if you will, which tends to make sense in a predominantly white area. Not to mention I've learned about so many black accomplishments and accounts in US history that I would have never known about if it wasn't for the recent murders mentioned in the letter. Like mentioned in the letter, to try to fully change the curriculum would be a state issue, but it still must be mentioned that it's a problem we aren't learning more about black people and others of color but learn more about what white people have invented, created, and done. We learn about the horrors of war and the Holocaust in AP Euro and the CP level class, why aren't we also learning more about the horrors that black people and people of color have faced in this country? Our school district preaches diversity but we can do so much better when it comes to our education. We must take more focus in shaping our youth to be tolerant, compassionate, understanding, and be educated more than just in our white history."

Student ('19) - "From the exterior, you would think that Upper Merion is an inclusive, diverse school. But within those walls it is the complete opposite. There are many ignorant students who haven't been taught to look beyond their privilege. Students that have an address with the 19405 zip code get treated like it's not their school. Bridgeport is referred to as "the ghetto" by our neighbors in King of Prussia... I wonder why."

Anonymous - "Considering how diverse our school is and how we have a school holiday for it, it's surprising that this hasn't come sooner."

Anonymous - "I was confused with the other Asian girl in class repeatedly for the entire school year in 11th grade. And 10th grade. And 9th grade... you can get the pattern. I know the nerdy Asian stereotype, but I don't think I'm the only one who can do the math here."

Anonymous - "Black history is still history."

Student ('19) - "Upper Merion is absolutely a community of caring teachers and staff, but they can and should do more to teach the generation that is rising up to take their places about racism so that they can break the cycle."

Anonymous - "Embrace this change! We NEED this change! This will make the Upper Merion students more educated on what is happening in today's world."

Anonymous - "I completely agree that more Black history must be taught along with anti-racism. We need to be open to the conversation that we've always pushed away. Thank you for doing this! Black Lives Matter!"

Anonymous - "Changing the future requires action in adolescence."

Anonymous - "The racial injustices that occur in Upper Merion are looked over and ignored, yet the teachers and principals still stand for by the statement "No Place For Hate." From the slurs used by non-black boys in their discord servers, to the blatant racist and uneducated statements students post on their social media stories, we are done with this behavior. We are sick of it."

Anonymous - "Living in a majority white school district meant not seeing people who looked at me until my 7th grade year. I've always prepared myself for racial microaggressions. From students and even teachers."

Our school is so hesitant to address these issues that occur to POC. We need more conversations and we need to acknowledge that racism does still occur and exist. My grandfather experienced segregation. My great great grandfather was a slave on a Virginian plantation. Slavery and the Civil Rights movement is not a ancient part of American history, and its outcomes did not give a complete solution to the injustices we face. I hope UMASD can actually look toward reforming our education in order to better our future generations."

Student ('17) - "While I will always appreciate my time at UMASD, it is disgraceful that I did not learn about the true history of this country until I opened my eyes and went to college.

Racism and slavery are not just one unit in American history, they are pervasive and entwined with every major historical event that has every taken place in this country. We should not just be learning about the accomplishments, hardships, and power of the Black community for one month or one section of history class but in every subject throughout the year. I am sickened by the fact that we still continue to teach students about Columbus but fail to acknowledge the mass genocide of Native Americans or the fact that we learn about our Founding Fathers but fail to tell students that many, including our first president, were owners of enslaved people. As a POC I am incredibly hurt by the denial of true history and white and western-centric approach to educating our children. If UMASD truly aims to build the leaders of the future then this district needs to begin by not just being an ally, but choosing to be anti-racist every day in its curriculum, hiring practices, activities, budget, and beyond."

Anonymous - "I was a member of the Asian Student Association, and several members of the club switched out a playlist of South Asian music with K-POP. Considering the history of colorism in Asian culture, this was a racist/caste-charged action. Furthermore, the same members would be elected to the presidency and exclude a white person from joining the club based on race."

Student ('18) - "I had one Black teacher during the entirety of my twelve years in the Upper Merion School District. I had zero teachers who were non-black people of color. Systematic change comes from the top, and without racial diversity on the staff across every school in the district, curriculum and environmental changes will not be nearly as effective. UMASD needs to give non-white students a chance to have role models who look like them in the classroom and to actively provide opportunities to Black and non-white POC teachers in the hiring process.

I also want to emphasize the importance of intersectionality in anti-racist curriculum changes. Emphasize Black women and Black queer people, who have constantly been ignored and oppressed throughout history. Talk about queer rights movements and the role of Black trans women as much as we talk about Martin Luther King Jr. and the Civil Rights Movement."

Parent - "I am so proud that my children have friends who are so passionate and articulate. Allowing them to guide the curriculum would be the best thing the school district could do for the children in school, the community and the world."

Anonymous - "I believe that our schools should work better to be anti-racist. This is because I've seen the racism that is prevalent in everyday school."

Student ('19) - "This letter was written beautifully! Thank you for writing this and opening up the eyes of our school district as a whole. We need to do better and I believe this letter is going to start that change."

Anonymous - "Coming out of Upper Merion, I felt that I hadn't learned enough about black people that contributed to our history or enough about the Civil Rights Movement (for example). I was unaware of what Juneteenth was because I was never taught it in history class."

Student ('18) - "Change starts locally. Let's put our money and effort where our mouths are."

Anonymous - "The fact that we have not reformed our education system sooner to accurately depict what POC have gone through proves that systemic racism and bias continue to be an issue even in modern day, this isn't something people should deny!"

Student ('21) - "Let's share history with how it changed people, not just how it changed society."

Student ('20) - "As a black woman and a history major, I had high hopes for the Upper Merion history staff. Unfortunately, I was let down. To sit there and be fed a white washed version of our country's history was disheartening. The lack of time spent on black American history or the history of any minorities in this country shows a lack of empathy for the people of color in these classrooms. We know there is history that is not told, sugar coated, or skewed to make us more comfortable. But we need to get uncomfortable. You cannot ignore something just because you don't like the way it makes you feel. Those who don't learn about history are bound to repeat it. So I ask the Upper Merion teaching staff as a black woman and as a history major, do better."

Student ('17) - "This school failed its Black and POC students. This school disproportionately punished students of color. This school AND the middle school did not take appropriate action against incidents of racism and xenophobia. When I went to get my senior graduation project's book drive forms signed, I was told I was "helping criminals kill more people" by collecting for Books Behind Bars. When I went to print my flyers on the topic of mass incarceration and the prison industrial complex, I was ridiculed by a library assistant. I saw the dress code disproportionately applied to women of color. I saw white students hold up xenophobic signs at a mock presidential debate and no one was held accountable for making many people feel unwelcome in their own school. I saw middle school teachers allow kids to harass and bully kids because of their ethnicity and race and stay silent. This school system has failed its students. This is unacceptable."

Anonymous - "There's room to educate students about systemic racism, yes, please yes. There is more room to discuss racism in the workplace - all industries. Since these high schoolers are about to experience the real world, they should be informed and have discussions with their teachers about racism in healthcare, higher education, and even tech. All can be discussed in any class at any time and both teachers and students should brainstorm solutions together. If students choose the college route, they should especially be informed about graduation rates by race and how this can and will change in the future using these high school discussions."

Anonymous - "Until it was brought to light I had never truly realized this problem within the Upper Merion System before."

Anonymous - "Black history IS the American history."

Anonymous - "The time for change is NOW."

Anonymous - "In Mr. Crowley's American History class in middle school, we picked cotton in class as a "fun activity." This blatantly romanticizes the manual labor inflicted by slave plantations, and rendering the suffering of Black people into a casual classroom assignment should NEVER be okay."

Anonymous - "I wanted to send you a story I heard from teachers when I was in high school and volunteered at the middle school. When I was volunteering there in 2016, white students in a 6th grade math class pretended to whip the Black students in their class and received minimal punishment. In another 5th grade case, a white girl hit a black boy on his head and gave him a concussion, and she only got ISS - whereas if the roles were reversed... Also, the English Language Learner students I worked with were mercilessly "othered" at the middle school by many of their subject teachers. It was truly disturbing. There were also cases of administrators /counselors reporting people to ICE."

Student ('18) - "As a previous student of Upper Merion Area School District and as a current student at Cal State Fullerton, I have seen areas in which school institutions can do and must do better. My eyes have been open to the severe injustice in this world and the lack of urgency to educate individually and to those in our communities. With this era of a call to action, Upper Merion has the opportunity to step up and make an impact in the lives of the youth of tomorrow. Now is not a time to be hesitant. Now is a time for change."

Anonymous - "At my time at Upper Merion, I had plenty of "Pro-Women" or "Feminist" discussions, but often race was an issue that was glossed over. We read books published by white people, for white people. Also, labeling within the grades was hard to miss with there being clear definition of who was in the "advanced" classes and who were in the lower classes. This can be extremely detrimental. I hope for a change that will be the cause of inspiration for the future graduates of UM. Once a Viking, always a Viking."

Anonymous - "I'd like to mention the budget for police in Upper Merion. When I checked last, I saw that 42% of the budget in 2019 went to policing. This is equivalent to 19 million dollars. I'd like to know more about where all this money goes to."

Anonymous - "In order to prevent racism, oppression and discrimination in our community, it is necessary to teach students about such topics. Providing education to the children and teens in our community will allow for a more accepting and safe environment for people of any race or ethnicity. "

Student ('20) - "Upper Merion must stride to make up for its lack of diversity by integrating more knowledge about minority people and communities, thus substituting experience with power. "

Student ('22) - "Public educators have no place being racist, nor does anyone else."

Student ('19) - "Everyone should be educated about the positive and dark sides of our history to make a better future."

Anonymous - "I would just like to say, kids in this school district are not educated on black oppression in America. They do not see their privilege, and it is damaging for them to think that racism isn't an issue."

Student ('22) - "I fully support the Black Lives Matter movement and will always fight for equality for people of color, gender, and sexual orientation. It is a privilege to be white and I hope that those who bear the privilege acknowledge it, learn, and move forward. I expect Upper Merion to implement changes and hope that they encourage everyone within the community to educate themselves and act on the issues in today's society."

Anonymous - "Attending the Upper Merion school district all of my life, I was only taught what "was in your so called curriculum". When bringing attention to teachers about truth I was told " this is what we were told

to teach". Being a student there at that time, we endured so much racism from other students that has still left scars until this day to remind us that we were never equal at your school district. It's about time that the district steps up and breaks generational curses, that plagues this district as well as others !"

Student ('21) - "We need the UM Board to help support against all the injustice and discrimination happening in a lot of place in our country."

Student ('23) - "I hope that our school district as a whole can accept the fact that this racism occurs and is quite real. And in acknowledging it, we will be taking the first step in fighting it."

Anonymous - "I feel as though the police forces should be retrained so these deaths can stop happening! Minority groups have had it rough for way too long, and we need to start the change."

Student ('93) - "I matriculated through the UM school district and experienced many instances of racism like the day I walked into school and red n*****s in Texas was written all over several lockers, 30 years later and my 3 children, of which only one graduated in 2019 and absolutely hated HS primarily because of the lack of staff diversity and the continued race issues where many students of color were automatically labeled. I only had one teacher of color my entire time at UM , Mrs. Nutter, and She is still one of only 2 teachers of color at the middle school and even less at the HS. What does this really say about our district. As both a parent in the district and an alumnus I am beyond disgusted at the lack of diversity in the district from the top down! If students of color never see anyone in a position of leadership who looks like them how will they ever believe that they too can become a leader. We literally have two HBCU's in our immediate area that are known for their teaching programs yet the district continues to put forth the falsehoods that they cannot find teachers of color. Is it really that you can't find or just that you haven't tried?"

Anonymous - "The color of our skin is determined by the presence of a pigment known as Melanin. Who would have thought that the presence of this pigment will determine the way we are treated in society? Everyone, regardless of how much Melanin you have, should be treated equally and granted the same rights and opportunities."

Anonymous - "I transferred out of Upper Merion to an all-girls high school. Originally I thought that my new private high school was the definition of white privilege and that Upper Merion was very diverse and treated students with more equality, however after recent conversations at protests, I have learned that this is not the case. I was disappointed to hear that teachers had encouraged some of my friends to take lower-level classes with no solid basis, leaving them to assume it was on the basis of their skin color. This is disgusting and needs to end now."

Student ('17) - "Upper Merion is a school that has always felt open and welcoming. As a non-black POC I felt comfortable. I can't say the same for the black student's experience. There is always room for improvement and remaining silent on this issue takes the side of the oppressor. "

Anonymous - "While at UM, we did a 'One book One school' program that featured books on police brutality. while this was good, they should be integrated into the curriculum and have more mandatory discussion on their relevance to real events."

Student ('18) - "As a black woman who grew up in the Upper Merion school district, I can confidently say that more work needs to be done. There has to be a greater commitment to educating both students and teachers on topics relating to black history, systemic racism, microaggressions, etc. Much of the black history I

know today is from my own research, which stems from the lack of in-depth curriculum on black history in our school system. Schools should be built and maintained as an environment where ALL education is encouraged. We can't censor or block important pieces of african american history, because it is "uncomfortable". Throughout my whole time at Upper Merion, I have only had one black teacher. We need more. There are many qualified and willing African American teachers who would love an opportunity to teach at Upper Merion. I have also had my fair share of racially insensitive terms/microaggressions spoken around me/directly at me. I contribute this to the lack of knowledge on what these racially insensitive terms mean."

Anonymous - "'Be the change you wish to see in the world' is a Gandhi quote UMAHS challenge day students live by. It is time to put our words into actions and turn our school community. We must implement these changes into our school district in order to begin seeing positive changes in the UM community and the rest of the worlds. I am inspired by the efforts of my fellow graduates who put this together, and they make me proud to be a POC alumni of UM."

Student ('22) - "I want to be able to learn more about black history in my school's curriculum. It's a step closer to full equality and justice for the black community. I also think it will be good for the teachers/staff who may have a negative opinion on the BLM movement and they will stop being so close minded and racist."

Anonymous - "While attending college and receiving higher education, it became alarmingly apparent how euro-centric my high school curriculum was. I found myself in conversation with others saying that I had spent a year learning about 'global, non-western cultures' only to be met with disbelief that it was ONLY A YEAR. It's a harmful message to spread that ONLY white cultures contributed to the development of the world. It's discouraging to many BIPOC students that their history, their families stories, are not worth learning. Why don't we learn about the Nile Valley's contribution to technology? Why don't we learn about the counties we've stolen human beings from other than memorising maps?"

Student ('22) - "I believe that as a school we should learn more about black history."

Student ('20) - "We all have racial prejudice in our minds, and I am no exception. The challenge is to not be ignorant but instead to recognize and change these implicit biases, and education is the key. By redefining our curriculum, we will take another step in achieving the school district's true purpose, fostering future leaders who will improve the human condition for all."

Student ('12) - "There were race wars in UM during my high school time. Stronger enforcement to educate about black history and white privilege will Make UM more of an equitable school district. These guidelines are very thorough, the people are telling you the change they want to see, make it happen."

Student ('17) - "My history teachers specifically ms. toto would rather show triggering films "about" history than actually teach real history."

Parent - "As a white woman and an educator I know I have a lot to learn, and I am listening and eager to be a part of the change this world desperately needs right now. I am saddened and devastated to read some of these personal statements and to realize how many Upper Merion students have been deeply affected by racism. I am encouraged by our youth and their desire and ability to make a difference. Let's come together and listen to each other, really listen, and be prepared to do whatever it takes to make each and every student feel safe and welcome in our schools and in our community. It's time to have some courageous conversations and start teaching children, beginning in kindergarten, about racism and what they can do to stop it."

Anonymous - "The diversity in UM is the reason why our school is so amazing to be a part of. I am lucky to have been a part of a school that is not white washed or discriminatory against the other members of our community and school."

Anonymous - "Just because you don't see your privilege doesn't mean you don't have it. While we do have a somewhat ethnically diverse area, that doesn't mean that there is no systemic racism or other political issues that are not being addressed by community leaders. Whether you are a student or an adult, it is our job to begin to create equality in our community, county, state, and country. Don't let people who are stuck in old ways that are current issues stop you from doing what is needed to create change. It is your opinion, our future, and the state of our country."

Anonymous - "The graduation speech for Upper Merion during my year was about being able to see sunshine in the cracks of the high school's walls - to see the good bones of a bad place and persevere. To be able to do so is a privilege that not all are given. For many students, Upper Merion is and was a place of agony, and the school needs to own up to that - acknowledge that some students are given more opportunities than others by the education system - and make distinct, tangible changes."

Student ('18) - "Our children need more than simply knowing our history; They must understand our failings and we must equip them to strive for a far better world than we could ever achieve."

Anonymous - "The racial injustices that occur in Upper Merion are looked over and ignored, yet the teachers and principals still stand for by the statement "No Place For Hate." From the slurs used by non-black boys in their discord servers, to the blatant racist and uneducated statements students post on their social media stories, we are done with this behavior. We are sick of it."

Anonymous - "The first time I heard the n-word was in an Upper Merion classroom. While reading To Kill A Mockingbird, my 8th grade reading teacher urged a white student to say the n-word for authenticity. There was no explanation of the use of the word, no attempt at substitution. As a current teacher, this situation is even more outrageous to me than it was when I was a child, feeling things I hadn't learned the words to express. To say the curriculum at UM needs a reformation is an understatement. Aside from a few sprinklings of color, the texts read, the people celebrated, the historical events covered, were overwhelmingly white. Reading texts with largely white characters and authors communicates to those equally-valuable minority students that their experiences do not matter or exist outside of oppression narratives. Young black students need to see that black people can be mentally ill, powerful, protagonists, modern, coquettish, and all of the other things that white people get to be unabashedly. As a former UM student with a sibling still matriculating through UM, seeing this change would be a sign of true intention to inspire excellence in every student, every day."

Student ('14) - "In my ten years at UM, I can think of one black teacher that I had: Ms. Nutter. This lack of representation in and of itself should signal to the district that they are not doing enough. Schools have a duty to be actively anti-racist. UM must teach students about systemic racism and work to fix their own forms of systemic racism: Why are there so few black teachers? Why are there so few poc teachers? Why are the gifted/AP classes more white than CP classes? How are students punished at school and which students are punished at a disproportionate level? Self-reflection and a deep analysis of the district's own issues is crucial."

Anonymous - "As a person of color I felt that the curriculum was mainly focused on making white students and teachers comfortable."

Anonymous - "Do better, Upper Merion."

Student ('17) - "I have been discriminated against by a teacher here at UM during my time there and want justice to be served. Teachers are there to support and teach students. Miss Vargas you have offended me and many students for no reason."

Student ('17) - "This means a lot to me. Being a BLACK woman. But, being a black woman who attended Upper Merion Area High School. I have encountered so many racist acts within this high school. Please do whatever is necessary in order for African Americans to feel safe & welcomed in this building. In this area. In this world. We deserve it and won't rest until that day comes."

Anonymous - "We need to do better, and that starts at early education of these important topics. The Black community and people of color have to learn these things at an early age, so why don't we start teaching these issues at an early age? Change can be made here, in the classroom. Education about the hardships of People of Color allows for more empathy, understanding and not only gives voice to this community, but educates others as well. The Upper Merion School District has a choice- to remain ignorant after a few small acts of performative activism, or to actually update curriculum and foster change."

Student ('13) - "There needs to be more added to the curriculum about Black history, and it shouldn't be limited to being taught on Black History month. It's bad when 90% of my black history, Mexican history, etc, is learned from my own personal interest and research, rather than taught by the school system."

Anonymous - "I am an Asian American and I am non-black. I have grown up to experience many instances of racism and discrimination. However, I have also grown up to know, exercise, and live a lifestyle where my rights are known and applied. I have grown up privileged. Known as the model minority of our American culture, Asians are assumed to be the stereotypical smart kids, the artistic kids, the musically inclined kids - all titles being those that have been used both to our advantage and to our demise. However, we have not experienced a lifestyle where these surface-level characteristics have been inhibitory towards our success, our ways of living, and most simply, our lives. We, despite having such titles, are not killed for it. We are not murdered by the authority of society for these titles. While we are set apart, and while we experience prejudice due to the ignorance of the uneducated, we do not have to cry, "I can't breathe," to inhale air in the presence of the lawmakers, justice system, and policemen.

As I look towards the streets with my privileged eyes, I witness the backward progression of American history - in which this country has turned its back towards the foundational basis of its creation. While we continue our 4 century-long fight towards establishing and promoting equal human rights, we seek to define "normal".

We lost our "normal" a while back, with the emergence of a deadly virus that shifted the world's views on hygiene and gatherings. That was the beginning. We took to social media, making jokes that 2020 couldn't, wouldn't, and shouldn't get worse. Prior to that time, many of us were satisfied with our "normal". Our "normal" was...normal. It was accepted, known as a false sense of stability. It was normal. Until our lives got disrupted with unprecedented events, each and everyone being unbeknownst to us, we accepted "normal" with open arms. This socially accepted lifestyle was created by the generations before us, of which had succumbed to a great ignorance of their ambience. Rather than "normal", these individuals manifested "sufficient". In the world where injustice can be ignored, where the numerous deaths of black people can go unnoticed, where the country's leaders can go on leading despite the many accounts of rape, sexual harassment, and abuse being revealed - living a "sufficient" lifestyle is enough to attain success as a privileged - dare I say white - person. Flowering a gentle, translucent film around us - a sheer bubble of thoughts, rather

- we live in a society where we choose to neglect. We, in our pretty “normal” life, refused to confront the true problems that prevent our society from thriving, simply because it made us uncomfortable, sad, and anxious. We refused to confront simply because it made us feel as though our accepted “normal” would crumble, sifting through our feeble fingers as we frantically grasp for the stability of a known lifestyle. We have since dissected “normal”, peeking into each of the crevices that make us question our morals and beliefs.

While the American education system teaches with a bias towards white leadership and authority, do not, for one second, neglect the foundations of the country that teaches the normalization of racial disparity. Do not, for one second, forget that this country was built on the soil of indigenous inhabitants, each with their own beautiful cultures, and each marginalized - labeled as “barbaric”, “savage”, and “inferior”. Do not forget that this country was fueled by the backbreaking labor of black slaves who have suffered at the chokehold of their white masters. Do not forget that this country was created and shaped by the energy of immigrants, refugees, dreamers. Do not forget that this country continues to represent the seclusion of the native people, the segregation and discrimination of black people, and the prejudice of immigrants. Our American society continues to prevail by means of trampling upon the broken bones of its very foundation. “Normal” is a society where we can live despite knowing that this country’s systems have always stood for injustice. We yearn for a “normal” that accommodates to all - a “normal” where black children, men, women, trans individuals, and elderly, do not have to die due to the prejudice associated with the color of their skin. We yearn for a “normal” where Juneteenth is nationally recognized and mass rallies of racist people cannot be held. We yearn for a “normal” where justice can be served without the mass mobilization of the people - where the justice of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and countless others can be served without hesitation. We yearn for a “normal” where the rights under the United States Constitution can be applied to EVERYONE. We yearn for a “normal” where DREAMERS do not have to sit, anxiously, as they await a courthouse approval in which one of the highest powers of the country tries to push the denial of. We yearn for a “normal” where Hispanic people, terrified of their life as they hide their valuables, do not have to be forcefully ripped from their lives. We yearn for a “normal” where white supremacist groups can be deemed as illegal. We yearn for a “normal” where people will not see public health and mask-wearing as “sex slavery” and an ultimate infringement of rights. It’s not. We yearn for a “normal” where trans individuals cannot be denied adequate healthcare, for they are no different from the next individual. We yearn for a “normal” where legalized, modernized slavery cannot permit. We yearn for a “normal” where black communities and their school districts do not experience setbacks due to the lack of funding. We yearn for a “normal” where those who are economically privileged use the privilege to set them aside from black scholars who lack such privilege. We yearn for a “normal” where those who are privileged acknowledge their privilege.

Though to the lawmakers and authority of this broken American system, we yearn for too much.

The world is livid, each internal flame burning with so much passion, strength, and unity. But the world is also broken. The world is broken and unjust as peaceful protesters suffer from physical pain, as black people continue to succumb to police brutality, as people of authority refuse to pass reformative legislation, as leaders continue to prioritize their elections over domestic conflict, as international relations begin to fall apart, and as justice remains unserved. Our world is broken and unjust, and there is not enough being done to prevent the inhabitants of this planet from hurting, crying, dying.

Now, when we chant the names of those who have passed as a result of racism, we yearn not for our accepted “normal” anymore. Now, we yearn for progression. To progress, we must start at our foundational points - the origin of our constructive intellect and consciousness. To start, we must begin with our children and our classrooms. Only then can we provide the next generation with an adequate understanding of what it means to be tolerant, respectful, unprejudiced, and actively anti-racist in the face of racism. We must not see a repeat of these events as we have in the past few years. The activism of Black people, despite sheerly learning about it in our courses, has persisted for over 400 years. We must be the face of change. We must stand in solidarity with the Black community. We must stand for what is necessary.”

Anonymous - "Upper Merion is a great place. But I have witnessed, and I am friends with people who have experienced discrimination because of their race, sexuality or something personal. I believe this letter is a path to make the school district a better place."

Anonymous - "Education goes beyond implementing short term unproductive programs such as DARE, long term education about BLM, LGBTQ+ and more shouldn't be a question when it comes to applying it to the curriculum. We can no longer stand with teaching one narrative, it's time for change and the time is now."

Student ('18) - "I have known Upper Merion to be a diverse township with people of all different walks of life. Reflecting back on my time in the school district, I can note that not nearly enough had been done to embrace this diversity, particularly with regards to the Black community. Education needs to go so much further than reading "To Kill a Mockingbird" in middle school. There is so much that our students are not taught about black history that has direct correlations with the horrifying issues the group currently faces today. The school board has the power for students to leave Upper Merion being more educated and aware, and stopping a cycle of racism that has been present in this country for far too long."

Parent - "As the parent of a young child, I chose my "forever home" in Upper Merion in part because of the diversity. I am looking forward to my daughter joining the school community, and I am committed to ensuring a thorough, anti-racist education for her, her peers, and all of the students in the community."

Parent - "In addition to creating an anti-racist curriculum, we also need to begin teaching the truth about the US history. To this very day I am unlearning the white washed lies taught by the public education system.

There is systematic racism within the educational system and we need to address it right here, right now.

I don't care about 'state laws'.

Change begins with us."

Anonymous - "Another Asian-American student was explaining to our English teacher that she wanted to lighten her skin because dark skin was not valued in Asian culture. As an Asian-American woman myself who has been shamed by my family for getting tan, I found it very uncomfortable that another student was excusing colorism on the basis of Asian culture - we need education that allows us to question these traditions instead of silencing them and letting situations like this happen without questioning."

Anonymous - "One of my teachers told me that since i'm not from America, I wouldn't be as fluent at speaking English even though my country's official language is English. Ignorance at its best. I haven't been taught by a single teacher of color. Teachers tend not to care about how they are pronouncing a non-white name. Classes are generally divided by race and teachers make no effort into mixing us. "

Anonymous - "It felt that many of the teachers would undermine people of color in the sense that they had lower expectations for them, and therefore the student was never pushed to do better in the ways of goals but rather kept barely afloat."

Anonymous - "I've heard the N word thrown around so much in the halls of UM, mostly from non-black students. It disgusts me. "

Anonymous - "It's sad that I can count on one hand how many times black history was acknowledged in Upper Merion."

Parent - "LOVE this! Congratulations to you for having the courage and the fortitude to move this forward."

Anonymous - "We need to be taught WAYYYY more black history than the teachers currently teach. Students of Color are more likely to get in trouble than non students of color (based on my observation)."

Anonymous - "I came back to speak with seniors about college and how important it was to ask questions about what they wanted to know but I was in on classroom and (white students were on their phones) but the African American students were yelled at for being on their phones. That made me uncomfortable as anything."

Student ('16) - "Daughter of two Upper Merion educators."

Student ('24) - "I hope Upper Merion can become a place where racism, homophobia, and other things of the sort will not be tolerated."

Parent - "I want to thank these former students for taking the time and effort to put together this thoughtful petition. As a parent with two elementary age children in UMASD, I believe we must advocate for reform at the state level. We must also commit to anti-racist education by presenting accurate historical accounts, encouraging thoughtful discussion of current events and ensuring our students participate in envisioning and building a future that truly works for everyone.

I am curious about the elementary, middle school and high school curriculum and how we can facilitate age appropriate discussions of current events. Our children are always watching and listening, and it would be helpful to have resources to allow parents to have consistent messaging."

Anonymous - "I simply wish to remind UMASD that tokenism is not the same as creating an actual safe, diverse, inclusive haven for people of all backgrounds to come together and learn. As a white alumni, I have never experienced racism first hand at this school, nor will I ever, but I stand with my BIPOC brothers and sisters, and I still realize the flaws in this school's system. Crazy how this school could give my black counterparts twice the amount of trouble for breaking the same exact rule as me, then turn around and plaster those same kids on the home screen of their website for their own messed up agenda, as if it was some kind of honor. That is not a true effort to celebrate BIPOC's voices throughout our communities, that is sheer tokenism. Do better."

Anonymous - "I believe Upper Merion can do more when it comes to their anti racism education. I recall having a teacher freshman year who said to a black student "I'm sure you've experienced it before" when talking about discrimination due to race. Every teacher should have to go through a professional development seminar, as well as there should be curriculum adjustments to accurately talk about history, not the whitewashed version we all learned."

Student ('24) - "Educating people on racism and privilege should not be a controversial topic."

Student ('22) - "I just appreciate what you are doing for our school community and just want you to know that the student council of the class of 2022 will be behind you. If you need any help I and I think my other officers will be very willing."

Student ('23) - "Don't ignore our problems and help us face it together."

Anonymous - "Upper Merion stands for diversity! It stands for a future where kids of different culture, skin color, sexual preference ect can thrive. The Upper Merion Township I grew up in stands for those things still and that needs to be reflected in their education system. Students and teachers must be educated and taught on how real racism is and how to use their voice for a greater purpose. They must not be silenced! Together we can change others' ignorance and start using our voices to make a difference."

Student ('24) - "This is gonna be in the textbooks someday. Stand up and let the future know that we're the ones that made a change."

Parent - "It is time to design to disrupt and reimagine education to meet the needs of all scholars!"

Anonymous - "Even as someone who is not a POC, I see discrimination against them at UM. I think that this reform was long overdue and will make UM a better, more accepting place to learn. BLACK LIVES MATTER! ACAB <3"

Anonymous - "I have learned more from documentaries and self research about the history of minorities in this country than I ever did in school."

Anonymous - "I think before more AP classes are added they need to be more welcoming to students of color. AP kids could learn A LOT from CP classes. If AP students are leading the charge, then they definitely need to recognize their privilege in that regard."

Anonymous - "I've been in UM since 5th grade, no one in UM has ever told me to be color blind."

Anonymous - "I am personally not affected by racism but have seen it directly through staff and peers as to where when a white student had said the N-word, there was no consequence but a consequence was given to a black peer for yelling at this white student for using that language."

Anonymous - "I was in class one day and a white boy was saying the N-word. As an African American, I asked him "Why do you think it's okay to say the N-word?" I never really got an answer and he was just being disrespectful. I got upset and I was removed from the classroom like I was in the wrong and he got no form of discipline. I also have proof of him saying it on a social media app."

Student ('23) - "This letter is only the beginning of tackling systemic racism & oppression. The 2019-2020 school year was my first year with Upper Merion but it didn't take long to see beyond the shiny facade the district puts up. Racial slurs and racist comments were constantly used by students in and outside of the classroom. When trying to address fellow students, they refused to listen with an open mind. Many of these conversations were within teacher hearing and yet they didn't acknowledge the situation. My classes lacked diversity and I had less than five black peers in each class. Not to mention the lack of diversity within the staff, in which all my teachers this year were white. In each of my classes, black scientists, poets, athletes, etc. were never covered. In extracurriculars, I had few black peers by my side, if any. Change was needed years ago and it's unacceptable that death was what needed to spark this. There are so many opportunities for educating students and staff. Educate the staff on owning and apologizing for their racist and insensitive comments and fire those who refuse to change. Replace outdated courses with ones that cover black oppression and current events related to hate crimes. Upper Merion needs to do better."

Student ('20) - "#BlackLivesMatter"

Student ('24) - "don't be an ass , show ur support"

Student ('20) - "Casual racism and white comfort has been taught throughout the UM curriculum. I've had to pick and clean cotton, hear white teachers not only say the n-word, but encourage other non-black students to say it, and ignore facts about history that would slander the name of prominent white historical figures, such as how George Washington's teeth were made from the teeth of slaves and Thomas Jefferson's treatment of the enslaved Sally Hemings in order to further glorify them. We read white-savior books in regard to American history. We don't learn about how the past oppression of people of color has led to current oppression and economic inequities. The last I learned about Native Americans was the Trail of Tears. Our discussion of American Imperialism is grossly inadequate, and we treat colonialism and war as a necessity and a byproduct of history rather than an atrocity. That treatment leads to ignorance in the discussion of the destabilization of non-white countries and the bigotry that has stemmed from it."

Anonymous - "It's necessary to learn about today's issues, not just the ones in the past."

Student ('20) - "open your eyes. racism is everywhere, and it's present in our school too. don't be blind to it, be proactive."

Anonymous - "I hate seeing African Americans being treated badly they are all human like everyone else. The color of someone's skin should not be the way you judge them."

Anonymous - "In 8th grade, I walked in the class and a few of my classmates were talking about how they created the N-word with the hard R so they should be able to say it, and then they started saying it and laughing until they saw me."

Anonymous - "While reading To Kill A Mockingbird in class, when the N-word appeared in the book the kids wouldn't skip it but they would read the line over and over pretending to mess up. When someone said something they said, 'I'm just reading a passage from the book.'"

Anonymous - "Back in 7th grade during a project for science, we had to build something strong enough to protect an egg. So my teammate for the project brought in cotton for the assignment. While I was stuffing the cotton in the envelope she said, "You're good at this, it must be because of your ancestors." And she giggled."

Anonymous - "In middle school, while learning the topic of slavery, every time the teacher would mention slaves or anything of the sort he would stare directly at me: the only black kid in the class."

Anonymous - "In elementary school, I would always be the one to get in trouble for things my white friends did. It was like no one would listen to me when I said I didn't do it. One example from elementary school is when we were out for recess, this white boy hit me in the face. When I went to the teacher and told them about it, I was told I was lying because "That's just not something he would do." I was treated as if I was making it up. In middle school, my best friend at the time, she was white, would be getting into trouble and doing dumb stuff, I mean hey we were just kids. However, one day she was told by administration that she should not keep hanging out with black people because they would keep getting her in trouble. Oh, and before you dismiss this saying that I was a troublemaker, nothing could be farther from the truth."

Anonymous - "Being able to recognize racism, whether in the form of blatant acts of discrimination or microaggressions, is not sufficient. Students need to be empowered with specific, focused, accurate anti-racist language and education to be able to combat these problems and lead solutions. The classroom needs to

actively embrace anti-racism with decisive action and integrity. Avoiding discussions on racism or painting history with broad, whitewashed strokes leaves the entire Upper Merion community suffocating from ignorance and hatred. Furthermore, by neglecting such a central part of preparing students for the real world, we are not only taking away their right to prepare for the future, but also to be heard. Why have we only heard these stories now? Because there wasn't a safe space before - and there still isn't one in real life."