



# HSCD TESTIMONIALS



JULY 7, 2020

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Hello All,

The following testimonials were collected over the past two weeks from current students, alumnus, parents and staff regarding issues of race and discrimination in Highland Central School District. The statements are alarming, vulgar and at times outline instances of assault. Names of specific individuals that have been accused have been redacted for the safety of the reporting individual. Some testimonials are anonymous based on each individual's desire. If you at any point feel like you need support while reading these statements, please contact Ulster County Mobile Mental Health at 1-844-277-4820.

In addition to their testimonials, many individuals also submitted suggestions for change. These are also included in this document. We utilized these suggestions in crafting a broader list of proposal that is included at the end of this document.

We thank you for taking the time to read every testimonial with care while considering how Highland can take steps to be a more inclusive and accepting environment.

Sincerely,  
Celia Patricia Gottlieb  
cgottlieb@middlebury.edu  
Highland, Class of 2017

Dean Riley  
Highland, Class of 2016

Alecia Wilk  
Highland, Class of 2016

Hanifah Hajiani  
Highland, Class of 2017

Nicola Wilk  
Highland, Class of 2019

## Form Used to Collect Responses

<https://forms.gle/NPXu3sW5ex2rBJWo8>

## HCSD Testimonials

The current Highland Central School District curriculum lacks an effective education on race and diversity. In its absence, a culture involving both students and faculty has developed, which permits ignorant and racist behavior at the expense of HCSD's students of color.

We're asking you, current students, alumni, parents, and faculty, to share your experiences with racism, whether these incidents affected you personally or were something you bore witness to during your time affiliated with HCSD. These experiences don't just have to be examples of overt racism but can also include more covert instances of racism (e.g., microaggressions, racial jokes made at either your or a classmate's expense, bullying, biased comments, etc.) committed by other students and faculty.

Our goal is to present these testimonies to the administration, along with appropriate resources and suggestions for ways to incorporate diversity and an understanding of systemic racism and imperialism into the existing curriculum. Due to the sensitive nature of this information, you will have the option to remain anonymous when we present your experiences to the administration. Furthermore, any names mentioned in your response will also be redacted, as this survey is not meant to target specific individuals but highlight a specific culture in our community.

HCSD has the ability to ignite change within our community and has the potential to teach the youth of our privileged town how to meaningfully engage with and discuss contemporary social issues. We hope that, by reading these stories, the administration will internalize the gravity of this issue and the effects it has on the past, present, and future students of HCSD.

If you have any questions, comments, or concerns, please contact [celiaagottlieb@gmail.com](mailto:celiaagottlieb@gmail.com)

\* Required

## Questions Asked

1. Email Address (will not be shared and is for future contact) \*
2. Name \*
3. Do you prefer to remain anonymous? \*
4. Affiliation at HCSD \* (Student, Faculty, Alumnus, Parent, Other)
5. Graduation Year (If you are a parent, please list you child's grad year. If you are a faculty member, please indicate the time frame of the event.) \*
6. Your Experience: \*
7. How do you identify? \* (Black, Latinx, Asian, Pacific Islander, Indigenous, Middle Eastern/North African, White, Prefer Not to Say)
8. Suggestions for Change: Do you have any ideas as to how to make a shift in HCSD? What events might you suggest? Books for faculty trainings? Things you would change

## Testimonial Responses

Name: Anonymous

Graduation: 2020 (I left the district in 2017)

Your Experience: Just an obvious culture of racism from students. Due to a lack of racial diversity, a lot of white students had no problem using the n-word and being openly racist

Race: White

Suggestions: A black history course would probably very helpful as well as better faculty training to speak against these acts

**Name: Anonymous**

Graduation: n/a

Your Experience: I (white alumnus) dated a black student during my time in the district. For the entirety of our relationship, other white students directed microaggressions at him or us, and the racial "jokes" (none of which were funny, btw) were too many to count. Students even made racist comments and jokes about his genitalia and our sexual activity, in classrooms and gym class, in close proximity to teachers. Students at HCS D are not only unafraid to be vocally racist, but they think it is funny and lighthearted. That means the school district is FAILING.

Race: White

Suggestions: We never learned REAL black history. We learned that George Washington had wooden teeth, not that they were stolen from the mouth of an enslaved black human being. We learned that Abraham Lincoln freed the slaves, but not about the sentence in the 13th amendment that still legalizes the enslavement of criminals to this very day, nor that Abraham Lincoln himself owned a slave. We learned that Christopher Columbus "found America" when it was never even lost, instead of how he incited a mass genocide and the effects that that still has TODAY on indigenous peoples. We learned white-washed revisionist history that pained racist white people in the holiest of lights. We learned that MLK was peaceful, but not about how the government wanted him dead, nor how Malcolm X believed the ends justified the means. The town of Highland believes it is okay to be racist not only because of the despicable ways our own president speaks about brown and black peoples, but because our history classes never told us the truth about Africans building this country, while the white man raped every other country he could, or about all of the evil ways men and women who ended up with statues and streets named after them abused and stole from real black human beings whose own history had been stolen from them. Our history classes cared only about glorifying the white man, even though it means lying to our children. Do fucking better. Please.

**Name: Anonymous**

Graduation: 2017

Your Experience: Middle school was the time where teachers were honestly the worst. For me one of the people that ruined my 7th grade year was Mrs. [REDACTED] the math teacher when I was given lunch detention for putting a hat back in my locker when the bell rang after she told me to. Mind you, another kid in class who was white had a hat on and all she told him was to just take it off and he never got the same punishment. There were multiple times where I was called to the office due to clothing choices when other girls would walk by wearing the same thing. It seemed as if they knew just who to target because we couldn't come to our own defenses or else they would contact home. There was also a music teacher who would literally THROW CHAIRS and yet he was never fired or disciplined till my sister had him as a teacher. It took someone hearing him listening to porn in class for him to get in trouble and fired. This same teacher would excessively yell at me for untying headphones!

In high school, I was forced to participate in a debate where I had to defend the confederate flag. When this announcement was made the other group participating in this debate were laughing in amusement because they knew one of the only black girls in class had to argue for something so racist. When I said I did not want to participate I was told that things like this happen and I will be in positions where I would have to debate on topics like this. Mind you, I was going to college as a nursing major. I would hear many students in the halls say the n-word and I would have to see classmates coming to school with confederate flags hanging out the back of their trucks. Another prominent memory was when my white

peers decided to try and argue as to why they should also be able to say the n-word and why it makes no sense that only black people were allowed to. This occurrence happened in my gym class.

To top it off one of the most telling issues with the school is that after 11 years of being in this school district I have never had a single black teacher. And If I were to say a student teacher in middle school does not count.

Race: Black

Suggestions: Actually, hire black teachers and look at who you hire because this whole district is full of teachers who do not understand their racial bias. Start teaching more black history because this school honestly Needs to educate not only the teachers but the white students who don't acknowledge their privilege.

### **Name: Victoria Pflaum**

Graduation: 2016

Your Experience: I had countless racist jokes made about me dating my Black boyfriend during senior year (regarding d\*\*k size, being a n\*\*\*\*\* lover, etc.) from other students.

Race: White

Suggestions: Books: Between the World and Me by Ta-Nahesi Coates; STOP forcing students to say the n-word in Huckleberry Finn (too many kids get excited by this), teach black history outside of slavery and the civil war, make sure the APUSH teachers say the civil war was about slavery (mine emphasized that it was about "states rights").

### **Name: Anonymous**

Graduation: 2015

Your Experience: Besides the apparent misogynistic culture run wild at HHS, I would say that the teachers who made an effort had an extreme case white savior complex, beyond belief truly, and did nothing to intervene when actual biases were playing out and actually racist and outwardly homophobic comments were made. HHS is a great school for white kids with Christian backgrounds but my childhood was littered with hitler jokes and Nazi chuckles. I think the worst of all is the misogyny however, so engrained in the culture even the female teachers do nothing to encourage women to achieve and be ambitious, a shame really, football players who do coke in the locker rooms, but if a girl speaks out of turn and asks for an opportunity she's slapped down and told she's too loud and opinionated. When I tell people what my primary education taught me, I say that it showed me how to advocate for myself and to fight hard for the opportunities I wanted, no one else was. And by senior year of high school my mother had the principal on speed dial to police the abhorrent behavior of the faculty. I can recall a specific instance where I wanted to participate in a leadership summit for students, upon finding out who was in charge, I didn't even have the opportunity to ask her, let's call her my junior year AP English teacher, took it upon herself to pull me out of study hall to tell me that I would NOT be even remotely considered. She berated me for upwards of 20 minutes telling me that she didn't ever want to hear that I was poking my nose where it didn't belong again. This same teacher also accosted me after class one day to blatantly ask if I was dyslexic, because I was the worst speller she had seen in 20 years of teaching. I think about these conversations on a weekly basis, they make me sick to my stomach, because at first glance she's the most liberal woman there, but in reality I think she embodies the issue of a wolf in sheep's clothes, she suppressed me, and I can't imagine what else she did to terrorize people. Id watch her bully students of color and glorify movies like psycho, all about stalking and toxic masculinity, every morning of my junior year, and she wasn't alone in her culture, it was my experience with her that codified my impression of Highland as a backwards place, ripe with cultural bias and poor attempts at righting the wrongs.

Race: White

Suggestions: The HHS faculty needs to actually hear from and be lead by and generally INCLUDE more people of color and ethnic backgrounds. It seems that the district itself is overrun with passive nepotism and unfair hiring processes that make this goal of reform impossible without a more inclusive and progressive environment.

**Name: Anonymous**

Graduation: n/a

Your Experience: [REDACTED] always singled me out in 8th for no reason. He continued this until I said something and got tired of his constant harassment. Worst part is he does the same to sister. Don't know why he feels the need to give his non-white students a hard time when he loves to talk about baseball and ATVs with his white students.

Race: Middle Eastern / North African

Suggestions: Need a more diverse staff.

**Name: Anonymous**

Graduation: 2017

Your Experience: I code switch depending on who I talk to so I was often told I'm the "whitest black kid" they know because I don't "talk black" a lot.

Race: Black, Latinx

Suggestions: In college I've taken sociology and anthropology classes and in them we were taught about sensitivity towards minority groups based on ethnicity, "race", gender, sex, sexuality, etc. I think maybe at some point during K-12 sociological classes should be taught. This can teach kids about the plight these marginalized groups face and how to be cognizant of their behavior when they are around other students that may belong to these groups.

**Name: SheRee Mills**

Graduation: 2018

Your Experience: Multiple kids wearing confederate flags on hats, shirts, flying the flags proudly on their vehicles on HCSD property. Not a word being said to them. They allowed it everyday for 4 years which leads me to believe that it's something HCSD stands for. That they stand for the values that flag holds. Our principles and security were more worried about girls wearing crop tops and kids vaping the bathroom then they were about racial microaggressions right in front of their faces... they focused their time and energy in the wrong places and disciplining the wrong kids. I witnessed a physical fight in one of my classes in the high school and this is how it went. Sitting in class and a fellow student who was white (this student would also display a swastika on his backpack and personal belongings by the way) was calling another student (black) the hard R repeatedly I remind you. The black & white student got into a physical fight in the middle of class because of this. While both were disciplined, the black student got a longer suspension for starting the fight than the white kid you was being openly racist in the middle of class. The white student was allowed to return to school so problem a couple days later still proudly displaying his swastikas.

Race: Black

Suggestions: HCSD preaches about diversity and how important it is. They hold diversity weeks/ culture weeks to try and represent all poc and those who are diverse, but in all 13 years of school I never had a black/poc as an educator. Do you know why that is? Because there are none. I truthfully can not name a black or poc who is an educator in the HCSD.

**Name: Anonymous**

Graduation: 2021

Your Experience: When I was walking to spanish class a kid behind me kept yelling the n-word. When I turned around he looked me in the face and called me the n-word. I was mortified because everybody started staring at me but nobody said anything. I ran to class and told my friend but somebody else was standing next to her. When I told her what happened the kid standing next to her started making a joke about it by pretending to say the n-word over and over again after I repeatedly told him to stop. Now i'm nervous every time I see the kid who called me the n-word in the hallway.

Another instance I wasn't involved in but heard about occurred during black history month. Every morning



the school played a song for black history month. A girl didn't like hearing the music so she posted on her snapchat story that black people didn't even deserve a black history month and she hated the fact that she had to listen to a song every morning because of it. When it was brought to the schools attention they barely did anything. They made a little announcement right before a pep rally that did absolutely nothing, just so they could say that they did something to discipline the girl. But it did absolutely nothing. I was so disappointed and disgusted with the schools response.

Race: Black

Suggestions:

**Name: Olivia Thibault**

Graduation: 2018

Your Experience: This is one example of many, probably the last instance of ignorance I experienced at Highland before I graduated. For senior spirit week, one of the themes was 70s. I decided to wear my natural hair in a fro that day. This was already something I would not have done normally since at Highland that style was practically an "invitation" for teachers and students alike to put their fingers in my hair. I was walking down the hallway in between classes when I felt someone pull my hair from behind. Two younger white girls, ran away laughing saying something along the lines of, "So it IS real." I saw where one of them went and I ended up having a conversation with her about not putting her hands on people, especially black women, without permission. This short conversation took place in front of a faculty member that took zero action. She didn't ask any questions about what happened even though she was clearly listening to what I was saying to the young girl. Unacceptable.

Race: Black

Suggestions: I think this all comes down to accountability. There should be trainings on microaggressions that are mandatory for faculty to attend. If HCSD is going to raise students that aren't going out into the world ignorant and racist, then the faculty need to serve as an example above all else. An emphasis on giving teachers more freedom to teach ACTUAL history. Black and brown history isn't just slavery and the civil rights movement, it's also not just ancient civilizations. Teach children about inventors, authors, actresses, scientists, teachers, and politicians of color. There might be some research involved but that isn't always a bad thing...

I think a Juneteenth event would be educational for the students of HCSD seeing as how many people had minimal information about it.

I also think a FUNDED and planned black history month throughout the entire school district is well overdo.

**Name: Anonymous**

Graduation: 2015

Your Experience:

RACE: I am a white cisgender female so my experience at HCSD will be different from students of color, LGBTQ+ students, etc. My experience at HCSD is not a fond one.

It did not include many teachers of color, Black teachers specifically. We only learned about white history and celebrated outdated holidays like Columbus Day, celebrating a man who committed horrendous genocide among Native Americans. I would have loved to have a diverse group of teachers to look up to and learn from, hearing different experiences from marginalized and oppressed groups to help me understand my privilege and how I could put it to good use would've been helpful as a teenager.

Even at age 13, when I started high school, I knew Christopher Columbus was not a hero and that people of color and Black people were treated differently than me in school. I wasn't always an outspoken advocate and ally, but once I found my voice, after high school, it became easier to fight against systemic, institutionalized and overt racism.

If HCSD gave students the tools needed to fight against white supremacy in all facets of life during our years in high school, taught history other than white man's history, and held assemblies combating

racism, we would have been better equip to fighting against racial injustices at an earlier age. I could've had the tools needed to speak up against any racial injustices I saw happening.

Not to be off topic, but I was raped during my junior year in high school. I'd asked the principal of the time to have an assembly dedicated to raise awareness of sexual assault among high school students and he declined. I know these testimonials are about fighting racism, but sexism is also very prevalent at HCSD. There also needs to be more awareness about sexual assault among teenagers to prevent anyone else being raped during their years at HCSD.

HCSD needs to do better a protecting the most vulnerable of their student population, students of color, Black students, LGBTQ+ students, female students and raise awareness about topics such as racism, Black history (not just during the month of February), sexism, rape, xenophobia, ableism, etc. The list goes on and on. Do better. Be more inclusive. Protect all students. And for the love of all that is good in this world, STOP allowing police presence in your schools. A quick google search of the school-to-prison pipeline will help you understand why police presence is so detrimental to Black students and students of color.

Suggestions: Books:

- So You Want To Talk About Race by Ijeoma Oluo
- Me and White Supremacy by Layla Saad
- White Rage by Carol Anderson

### **Name: Anonymous**

Graduation: 2022

Your Experience: So in middle school I was just in the lunch line with my two other friends who are also Mexican and a white classmate was behind us and was trying to cut us in line but we wouldn't let him and so then he said something along the lines of "fuck off just go back to your country." I just responded with "fuck you" but inside I was really hurt and looking back I really wished I would have said something back but something that would have educated him just a little bit. The saddest part was that his Latino friend was standing right next to him when this happened but he didn't say anything to defend us or even tell his friend that he said something racist. Things like this always happen in Highland because most white people are ignorant and racists.

Race: Latinx

Suggestions: I don't know of any suggestions but I just loved how the first time I ever felt "comfortable" to talk about politics was in [REDACTED]'s public speaking class and he wasn't biased toward anyone's opinion but he still brings up racial inequalities and isn't afraid to talk about it.

### **Name: Anonymous**

Graduation: 2022

Your Experience:

Elementary School:

1. Students making fun on mine, and other student's ethnic food
2. a girl found out I was Indian, and told me she wasn't allowed to be friends with me

Middle school:

1. White boys in my grade telling my Mexican friends to go back to their country/ asking if they're illegal, etc.
2. Kids made fun of my parent's accents
3. At lunch, I explained my feelings on racism to my all white friend group. I told them how you can't be racist towards white people and they all started fighting with me. A teacher even came in, and clarified to the students that reverse racism doesn't exist.

Highschool:

9th grade:

1. A white girl in my class compared me and my Muslim friend to terrorists. My Muslim friend and

I were talking about how it's annoying that POC are always randomly selected in the airport. The white girl then said "Well, YOU GUYS should be checked, because of you know, terrorists". Me and my friend both told the white girl how she was wrong and that what she said was extremely disrespectful. A few months later, the white girl read a book which talked about racial discrimination, and she apologized for the things she said.

10th grade:

1. Numerous friends of mine saying blatant racist things to me, and having other microaggressions. They justified it by saying they are sheltered.

Other:

- A student was literally walking the halls wearing a confederate flag on their backpack  
- in the hallway, someone referred to me as a black girl, and called my friend 'brave' because they were friends with me. I am not black but why is being friends with someone who is black brave???

Racism I have seen thru social media:

1. When I was a freshman, a HHS junior messaged me and said things to me including: "Do you defecate in the streets? I heard Indian people do that" and "Can I borrow 500 rupees?" also sent racist Indian memes to me.

Also called me a Paki (derogatory term towards Pakistanis... I am not Pakistani)

2. A student posted on his story how BLM is a terrorist organization

3. A girl said the n-word, and said other derogatory things on her story. (This was dealt with by the school, and she was temporarily suspended)

Race: Asian

Suggestions: 1. Recognize racial issues going on in the world, and invite uncomfortable conversation in the classroom and school environment. For example:

- in 8th grade, we had a public speaker who talked about his experiences being black. He also talked about tons of issues like racism, homophobia, discrimination, family problems, etc. At the end of the assembly, most of the kids watching started crying. Everyone I talked to was so touched, and I feel like we need more assembly's like this!!

- invite politicians, drag queens, and other 'unconventional' people to talk!

2. Provide aid to students in a timely manner. For ex. HCSD took WAY too long to talk about George Floyd and the recent events regarding police brutality. The school stated they have resources for families, however it is nowhere to be seen. Not to mention, the school didn't even make a post about it, instead they used the announcement feature on the website. It is lazy. Do better HCSD

3. Again, invite uncomfortable conversation into the classroom. Make kids read about racial discrimination and TALK ABOUT IT. Half of the students don't actually read the book, so might as well make them constantly talk about it during class. !!!!!Debate!!!!!!

4. Recognize the bias that faculty have. I know that New Paltz requires teachers to take bias tests.

5. Get actual feedback from BIPOC and POC students / faculty. I was invited to a conference freshman year to talk about discrimination in the school. All the faculty administering it were white, and some of the students attending were white too. The minority of POC teachers, and students should be there. Could also benefit from being open to only POC if the conference is about racial discrimination. If the conference is ab LGBTQ+ discrimination, it should be open to all people of the LGBTQ+ community FIRST, then others.

**Name: Ndeye**

Graduation: 2022

Your Experience: Unfortunately, I have had many experiences of racism at highland. I've had classmates not wanting to be my friend in elementary school because of where I came from. I've had people make jokes about me being African and making me feel ashamed to tell people where I came

from. I've had people look at me differently when I told people in my 6th grade social studies class that I was a Muslim. I also had many people call me the N word. I've had people pick on me about my hair. People would come up to me and touch my hair and I remember people asking me in elementary school if something was wrong with my hair. There is a lot of racism I've experienced in school.

Race: Black

Suggestions: I would like for the staff at ALL highland schools to hire more teachers of color. It is hard as a black woman to never see anyone who looks like me. They should also consider on having an African history class. So people can learn more about African American history. I also want them to enforce certain rules. This school has tolerated kids use of the N word. It's not okay and it glorifies that word like it's a joke and it's okay to say when it isn't. People died because of that word and we need to teach people that. **I'm tired of explaining to people why they can't use a racial slur.**

### **Name: Anonymous**

Graduation: n/a

Your Experience: Various experiences where my friends/peers have been racist towards my friends and other peers.

Race: Middle Eastern / North African, White

Suggestions: I think that books for faculty trainings are certainly a great idea. Maybe in addition to assemblies about drug and alcohol abuse, students could also learn about racial injustices in America. It is very important especially at a young age for children to truly understand what white privilege and racial injustices mean.

### **Name: Anonymous**

Graduation: 2022

Your Experience: I've experienced multiple experiences with students in highland highschool being racist whether it's saying N-word or mocking a persons skin color. Friends of mine in Highland High school also experienced Homophobia for being themselves and the teacher remains to work at Highland high school ( Mrs. ██████████ ) making student of the LGBTQ + feel uncomfortable and judged within the High school. Also I've gotten into a problem with a student and then a guidance counselor tried to Gas light the situation and say I called a white boy "milkshake" to exclude the fact he called me a "Nigga". Which was disgusting knowing the history behind the word. Student also did not get serious punishments and continues to say the N-word. I've seen Teachers in class rooms who do not Bat-an-eye when they hear students say the N-word and other derogatory terms directed at Black students. Faculty in Highland High school really need to reconsider how they deal with discrimination because us Black and Lgbtq+ are the MINORITY in the school and it's hard to say something when there's like 10 of us in the school and 100+ white people.

Race: Black, Asian

Suggestions: Fire teachers that has been convicted of racism and homophobia because they can't be "educated" on discriminative issues and be an Adult and an educator. Racist and homophobic students should be taken up into serious Matters and not only face "detention or suspension" their grades and reputation should be affected, not like it'd honestly matter because everything in society is handed to white people in society.

### **Name: Anonymous**

Graduation: n/a

Your Experience: Being a half Hispanic and half white individual I've been told multiple times things along the lines of "you're not white you're Hispanic" and also "you're not Hispanic you're white." They were always said in a deeming way, especially when I was called not white, as if I was being put down and "not good enough" for either category because I am mixed. In addition to that people ask me what my ethnicity is and very often joke that I am Mexican. I am not Mexican but I don't find it funny that that is used as a joke because there is also nothing wrong with being Mexican and once again people are looking down on a certain race. I would like to see a more inclusive attitude toward all races in the district

because there certainly is a divide between strictly white members of the district and people of other races.

Race: Latinx, White

Suggestions: I think students should learn more about current events and teachers should teach against racism. It seems like a given but I have not had one class or teacher that went into depth or really strives to teach us about racism in today's society and how we can not participate in it.

**Name: Anonymous**

Graduation: n/a

Your Experience: I noticed quickly that the perception of minority students (specifically male) was typically one of "they are a thug." I've seen minority students blamed time and time again for fights in which they didn't start.

I believe it is hard for minority students to feel accepted and understood when all of the staff/authority figures are white.

There is also a complete lack of knowledge on how to speak to minority families and there is NO attempt by many teachers to understand that many of these families are dealing with so much more than we know!

Race: Black, Latinx

Suggestions: Diversify the staff, make teachers take some type of race seminar, actually examine how teachers are treating students who are white vs who are minorities.

**Name: Anonymous**

Graduation: n/a

Your Experience: Overhearing non people of color using derogatory words.

Race: White

Suggestions:

**Name: Anonymous**

Graduation: n/a

Your Experience: History does not go in depth for African figures. Sometimes teachers will single out African Americans bc they think they did something just bc of their race.

Race: White

Suggestions: More diverse in race for teachers, go more in depth of African history, more in depth about slavery in the United States. Yes they should have information books for faculty.

**Name: Anonymous**

Graduation: 2023

Your Experience: In math class there was a boy named [REDACTED], he was talking about black people and then continued to say the n word loud and clear in front of the math teacher [REDACTED]. I did not say anything because I was scared to speak up but looking back at it now, I really should have gotten disrespectful. Another thing is the problem with black girls and other POC girls getting treated differently with what they wear and how they wear certain things. I remember I was in gym class, I really did not feel like changing that day so I just wore the outfit I wore to school. I had on a slightly cropped top on. Mind you, I have curves, my body is more matured than an average 14 year old. Coach [REDACTED] proceeded to call me over and comment on my top and how it should not show my stomach and it is not appropriate for gym. I then look around and see many girls that are NOT POC. (white girls.) wearing tube tops, cropped tops, off the shoulder tops etc. they were also skinnier than I was, so they did not get as much slander as I did. which is not fair at all. LASTLY I will be speaking for one of my POC friends and what they experienced in this racist school. she was in art class and having a conversation with her friends, the boy then proceeded to be nosy and he said "you can't speak up for yourself because you're black". she then stood up for herself, as she should. and she told him off and got really angry. after class, she was going

to gym and when she got there she had told COACH [REDACTED] what has happened. she said “ he probably didn’t mean for it to come out that way, it was probably an accident”. AN ACCIDENT?? are you kidding me?? that is a grown teenager who is pretty much aware of what comes out of his mouth all the time. there was no excuse for that comment. that also just shows we cannot go to any teacher without them defending the person who was very ignorant towards the victim. another thing is that in the hallways there are many non black people saying the N word in front of so many teachers. the teachers do not do anything. overall this school needs to do better and be more aware about what their students are saying, they cannot just be sent to lunch detention, they need more than a slap on the wrist.

Race: Black, Latinx

Suggestions: i feel like they should either have a class for black history and what ACTUALLY happened and the things black people ACTUALLY invented. they need to stop teaching us from the white washed textbooks that are given to us in global studies and we should start being taught facts instead. They should also start a club with people that would like to learn more about black history. and also we should be taught more about black history in ALL CLASSES.

### **Name: Anonymous**

Graduation: 2017

Your Experience: As a white female, I never experienced oppression within the school system first hand. I was welcomed with opened arms, even when I made mistakes. If I got an attitude with a teacher, they’d brush it off as it were nothing at all. It was always acceptable for me to have off days, but it was not acceptable for my black counterparts to have those same off days. Many times those off days for them would end in suspension, or even worse, explosion. In too many instances faculty were willing to let black students fall in between the cracks of our school system, they did not care if they failed them, just as long as their white students were excelling. For instance, in my graduating class a young man decided to go around telling people he was going to shoot the school up. While he did face consequences, he ultimately got to return. Our district allowed for someone who said something so serious back into the student population, but black students who had gotten into fights were permanently expelled. That is discrimination and racism at its finest level.

Besides that, during our annual spirit week we of course had the America themed day. While most of us dressed with American flag shirts, or at least the color theme.. others showed up representing the confederate flag. The confederate flag which is a symbol of slavery and white supremacy in this country. What kind of message did that send to our students of color, primarily black students? How did our school allow for a hate symbol, because that’s what it is at the end of the day, to be paraded around the halls with such pride? Girls get dress coded for shorts and tank tops, but racist teenagers can openly praise the confederacy? Too many teachers turned blind heads to it, too many officials let that stuff slide, once again failing our students of color.

Race: White

Suggestions: I genuinely feel that the history textbooks we have within every school, in every single grade, need to be done away with. They parade around this false history that America has been the greatest, that slavery wasn’t that bad, that segregation wasn’t that bad. As a student, I felt robbed of knowing the true foundations of this country. It shouldn’t have taken until I was in college to have been properly educated about the bloodshed that has occurred in this country. There needs to be honesty among students and teachers, or we will breed ignorance into yet another generation.

### **Name: Anonymous**

Graduation: 2013

Your Experience: On several occasions, other HHS students would make racist comments toward me and my fellow South Asian peers. We would often be referred to as terrorists. While these comments were made in jest, they were still inconsiderate. We brushed the comments off; that being said, the comments shouldn’t have been made in the first place.

Race: Asian

Suggestions: I'd consider adding a seminar on racial inequality or a series of schoolwide assemblies that address key socioeconomic and cultural issues. It might be worth adding a class that touches upon these issues (or alternatively, we should explore how we can incorporate these issues in existing classes).

**Name: Anonymous**

Graduation: 2023

Your Experience: - [ ] Two girls intentionally mocked and made multiple jokes regarding Mexicans and saying all should be deported and that they don't belong here. As I spoke up and confronted these girls, They laughed it off. One of the girls started to cry once they were confronted by the adult I told the story to. They continued to comfort her and make her seem like a victim. The middle schools' [REDACTED] insisted I was being sensitive and belittled my feelings.

- [ ] One day i was put in a group of boys for math class. This particular group of boys have always stated racist comments and nobody (including teachers) would say anything about it. As we started working these boys had started saying their usual comments. As I spoke up and said how it was wrong and hurtful, one of the boys started to say " you people are disgusting" and repeated "build the wall". Then somehow it turned into him saying homophobic statements. After that class I was told to fill a form the school offered. As I sat with an adult talking about the situation she tried to tell me how he didn't mean anything and insisted It came out wrong.

One day after school my brother seemed upset and wasn't being himself. I asked him what was wrong and he started to burst out crying. He confessed to me a group of boys repeatedly called him the n word, told him that he's a nasty black boy, told him to do whatever they say because they said he was their slave and told him they were going to beat him. My brother is a very quiet sweet boy. He knew this information was upsetting so I know he never wanted to tell me when stuff like this happened again. My sister also told me a group of girls told her she was disgusting because of the color of her skin. My sister and brother are both currently in fifth grade. These events happened during their time at the elementary school.

There have been a couple of times where students have worn MAGA merchandise to school. This has made me and my friends feel extremely unsafe and it is upsetting. The school usually allows these students to wear it and don't get shamed for it. The MAGA phrase is based on a completely corrupt and racist society.

Race: Black, Latinx, White

Suggestions: : the district should encourage teaching about how racism is wrong. When something racist and wrong is said, the adults and students should Not encourage staying silent and keeping it to themselves. Telling someone to keep it to themselves is saying it's okay. When these things are said we should be able to correct them with their mistakes and help grow our community into a positive welcoming place.

**Name: Anonymous**

Graduation: 2019

Your Experience: While I have never felt or experienced racism due to my privilege as a white female, I can count many times where I have seen it at HCSD. For starters, many of my former peers have felt the need to wear a confederate flag in school or on their cars in the parking lot. A flag that symbolizes hatred and racism towards black people and people of color. This not only can offend students of color, but make them feel unsafe and unwanted in their own school. A place where they are supposed to feel safe and protected. Although the high school and the middle school have dress codes put in place to control what their students wear, I have not ONCE seen any action taken place to control the promotion of the confederate flag in the school. Along with this, the amount of white student I have heard say the n word throughout my time as HCSD is outrageous. And not only do they say the n word, but they say it in front of teachers and then face no consequences. While HCSD has some loving and brilliant minds teaching us, there are some educators who need to get educated themselves. One time in

particular a teacher of mine tried to tell the class that reverse racism was real. She claimed to have witnessed racism towards white people and proceeded to say "Isn't it wrong that way too?". However there is no such thing as reverse racism. You cannot be racist towards white people because us white people have never been oppressed. So its impossible for us to experience it first hand. While I don't believe this comment was meant to be hurtful or harmful, that's exactly what it ended up being unfortunately. By her saying that to her high school class, it tells those kids that that is something they should believe. Which does nothing but hurt the education system at HCSD. These examples are just a few of the stories and experiences myself and other students at HCSD have witnessed or even gone through.

Race: White

Suggestions: I think there are two key factors that would help HCSD make a difference. Education and diversity. The lack of education is alarming. Not only by students but by faculty. We need to focus in more on teaching students about different culture and making sure teachers are respectful and politically correct when doing so. If we have a better understanding of the people who seem different to us, we may have a better chance of accepting them and being kind to them. Also I think HCSD would benefit on having more POC faculty. It's important to learn from different groups of people to get different points of view and experiences along the way. Without diversity we are just learning from one perspective and doing nothing to help stop racism in our community.

**Name: Anonymous**

Graduation: n/a

Your Experience: Hate it here

Race: White

Suggestions: If you really wanna make change start firing the people that work there who are openly racist and homophobic. Ms [REDACTED] should've been gone awhile ago but no she's still here even tho she's both racist and homophobic. If you don't start firing the people who make students feel less of themselves and worthless it just proves you don't give a shit and are only doing this to look good.

\*I must note that this teacher was noted in numerous testimonials as exhibiting racist and homophobic behavior.

**Name: Anonymous**

Graduation: n/a

Your Experience: White kids using the n word and thinking it makes them cool.

Race: White

Suggestions: Overall our history classes to include more history of POC and other cultures and how it is still affecting today's society

**Name: Anonymous**

Graduation: 2024

Your Experience: Highland middle school comes off as racist sometimes. The white kids in school say the n word. Which is completely absurd. I would LOVE to give names. I find it very disrespectful also the Hispanic kids and darker kids (still who aren't black btw) think it's funny and cool to say the n word. Can you get you school straight please.

Race: Black, White

Suggestions: I would have students be punished when they say racist things. Point blank period.

**Name: Anonymous**

Graduation: 2015

Your Experience: In elementary school, I would bring ethnic foods to lunch time, and White classmates would often say very nasty things about the food that I was eating, all under the careful eyes of "lunch monitors" who stayed quiet every time.



In 5th grade, some White boys in my class made fun of a quiet Brown girl for the "way she acted" (quiet?) and the way she dressed --- i.e. there was absolutely no reason to be making fun of her. They did not make fun of me in front of me solely because I would help them with homework.

I personally felt overt racism at one moment when I was on the school bus in middle school, and a fellow White classmate aggressively told me to "go back to India."

Another time, I bore witness to a fellow classmate who experienced overt racism. It occurred in "Advanced Math" in 8th Grade, and my peer (who I will not name) was told "go back to India \_\_\_\_\_!" by several students. The students then went on to tell me to stay in the United States, so that I could help them with homework. Nothing was said by the teacher at the time to quell the overt racism that was occurring in the class, full of seemingly "advanced" students.

The peer I mentioned above was repeatedly bullied throughout school, just because they were a hardworking student who happened to be Brown. At the time I attended high school, being a Brown hardworking student who wanted to do well and further themselves was seen as strange; even a threat to White livelihood and ownership in the Highland area. I felt this way myself, although this level of bullying was subtle with me - I naively tried my best to "hide" my brownness in order to fit in.

I (and other Black/POC friends who attended HHS) had many MANY instances of fellow White classmates referring to Brown/Black/POC as "weird" and "gross" - all unprovoked.

I'd like to believe that the peers who were racist to me and my other Black/POC friends have matured and grown after leaving Highland. But that's the thing... if they did mature and become more accepting of other cultures (i.e. not racist), they had to leave Highland in order to do so. This feels like a fundamental issue with Highland Central School District, as well as the town itself. As an educational body, it is HCSD's responsibility to educate students the proper versions of history, to diverge from Imperialistic and White versions of history, as well as to actively call out and punish racist behavior that is running rampant in our schools.

Race: Asian

Suggestions: It is extremely important to teach children about diversity and the world as it is (not a doctored version of history). This starts from Day 1, with kindergarten. Incorporation of children's books with stories highlighting different cultures must be made routine, and not as part of a special diversity day or week. Additionally, Highland has an extremely low representation of Black/POC teachers - when I was there, I don't remember having any teachers that were Black/POC at all. Recruitment of more faculty and staff of color should be one of HCSD's highest priorities.

It is extremely important for our teachers to approach and treat ALL students the same, and many times implicit bias gets in the way of this. Faculty MUST be given bias training and screened accordingly before new hires. An example of such screening is the Harvard Implicit Bias Test.

I understand that this is largely an issue of funding, but foreign language teaching should begin sooner - this would expose students to a new culture sooner, which can be helpful to the greater cause.

Teachers must not be afraid to speak out against any bias/racist events they are witnessing - far too many times, there were racist events occurring in classrooms. Classrooms are the LAST place students should feel uncomfortable in.

History curriculums and books used in the classes must be modified to reflect true history. Black history must be taught in a way that is honest and accurate, and learning about Black history should not be diminished to a single month of year.

## **Name: Kelly Stohr**

Graduation: 2014

Your Experience: There was very limited education in HCSD on how to discuss, identify, and correct racism throughout daily life (whether it's at school or not). I firmly believe that the formative years I spent at HCSD did not prepare me to be an ally for the black community and people of color. Because of this, I felt I had much to learn about anti-racism in the years following my graduation in 2014. I was fully prepared to do this work (as all people should), but I felt disappointed in HCSD for failing to set me and my classmates on the right path. Unfortunately, not every former student of HCSD is willing to put in the time and effort to educate themselves on black history and anti-racism. If HCSD commits to teaching their students about these topics from a young age, I believe Highland will become a more comfortable, accepting, and peaceful town for the black community to live in. It is my hope that the non-black Highland community will come together to recognize their privilege and use it to form a safer community for black

people: a community where they can go to school without experiencing micro aggressions (or worse), where they can feel like their culture is celebrated, and where they can walk down the street without being targeted because of their skin.

Race: White

Suggestions: First and foremost, racism must be HEAVILY discussed in history class. There are plenty of historical events that were left out of my middle and high school education, but one that comes to mind is the Tulsa Massacre of 1921. Each and every teacher at HCSD must commit to teaching their students about the endless racial injustices that are deeply ingrained in American culture and beyond (especially regarding injustices towards black people). In addition, I believe black culture must be celebrated throughout the rest of the curriculum at HCSD. I believe that there should be more books in English class by black writers. I believe that there should be more works in Art class by black artists. And as a former music student, I firmly believe that there should be more literature in Band by black composers and arrangers. Taking this a step further, every writer, artist, composer and otherwise with a history of racism that HCSD has previously welcomed into their curriculum should be removed. Celebrating racist figures in our history, the arts, or otherwise is doing a disservice to Highland students and exposes them to the wrong kind of people—the kind they shouldn't be looking up to. Outside of the classroom, I believe that each and every coach on a Highland sports team must be briefed on anti-racism practices so every student athlete is exposed to a zero-tolerance policy towards racism. Too often, racist slurs and stereotypes were exchanged in sports settings (locker rooms, practices, and games) and it needs to change, starting with the leadership at HCSD.

**Name: Julie Stohr**

Graduation: 2017

Your Experience: As a white alumni of HCSD reflecting on my years as a student I can now see the failures within our curriculum on addressing race and diversity. I am disappointed that I went years without learning about my own privilege and the ways in which I could go into the world and use it to support POC. All of what I know today regarding systemic racism has been self taught or learned in college. I went through my years in HCSD without discussions on racism today, even more importantly we went without lessons on how to correct racism if we saw it. The district lacked educating the students on black history in culturally responsive ways which striped students of constructive conversation on human rights, allyship, and justice.

Race: White

Suggestions: Teach the ways in which racism has been ingrained in America and push the young minds to create ideas and programs on how to fix this while still educating them on the history.

Teach more than slavery and civil rights in history class.

Celebrate black culture.

Use texts by black authors.

Read books such as “white fragility” and “how to be an antiracist”

Abolish dress code regulations which impose double standards for black female students.

Educate prevention of micro aggressions at a young age.

Teach students how to become comfortable being uncomfortable!!

**Name: Anonymous**

Graduation: 2020

Your Experience: i have seen students publicly displaying the confederate flag through clothing and actual flags in school/on school campus. it's a symbol for racism and we were rarely taught it's significance in classrooms. we were not really taught about the significance of the n-word or most of black history. i spent years learning about american history, i can rarely recall moments where we were taught about the horrifically racist past that america was built off of. not only that, but we were absolutely never given context to racism in modern society. as a mostly white student body and faculty, many students cannot comprehend that racism still exists because they don't experience it and they are not taught about it.

Race: White  
Suggestions:

**Name: Malia Brophy**

Graduation: Malia is a student from a neighboring school who has engaged in sports events.

Your Experience: Bad sportsmanship on the field using slurs.

Race: White

Suggestions: Teach them not to be racist, and to not teach racists things

**Name: Anonymous**

Graduation: n/a

Your Experience: I remember one of my former peers throughout elementary, middle, and high school was very dark skinned and because of that, many white kids in my grade would talk behind his back and make jokes about how dark his skin is. I remember this occurring from elementary all the way to high school. They'd laugh and joke about how "you couldn't see him in the dark" and compare the color of his skin to insulting things, and would call it "blue". It's hard to think back and remember all of the specifics, but I remember many peers in my grade would make these jokes and would only view him as somebody to laugh at. Nobody was lowkey about it.

Race: White

Suggestions: It would be nice to see a staff with more diversity! I know our area is predominantly white but it would be nice for students to have a more diverse and inclusive staff to connect with and learn from. It's also important for students to learn about more black history, not just the civil rights era and slavery. The district should also look into providing students with new courses to take as electives pertaining to race in America. Like a class on social justice for example. Faculty should all believe in and should all emphasize anti-racist rules and policies throughout the school.

**Name: Anonymous**

Graduation: n/a

Your Experience: During teachings on the Holocaust, a lot of the staff looked on as students told me that I would be murdered and which of my friends would kill me if we were alive then. I was inappropriately addressed during multiple different classes at my time in Highland asked to explain what Jewish holidays meant (which would normally be fine) but I was "thanked" for getting kids a day off on Yom Kippor. In addition I was at a sport practice and a student laid pennies down on the track and would frequently drop change to see if I would turn my head because of the stereotype of how Jewish people "love money". A fellow Jewish student had taken pictures with who she thought was a friend but he made the location on the photo Auschwitz. This is honestly what I can remember best but there have been other incidents as well.

Race: White

Suggestions: I think there needs to be a 0 tolerance policy on this behavior, and more events like Foreign Language night should be implemented in order to further educate the student body as well as the staff on understanding systemic racism and as such avoiding any micro aggressive or explicitly aggressive behaviors. Lastly, I think a training video or something to that effect that could be required of the staff to observe, to hopefully educate them better as well.

**Name: Anonymous**

Graduation: 2017

Your Experience: The one thing that stuck out to me the most (as for being white and never being targeted for my race) is that our history curriculum has a serious gap in Black History, which is also American History. There were things I learned in college that were never ever mentioned in my courses throughout my time at HCSD. I learned about redlining, Tulsa Race Massacre/Red Summer, Black Wall Street, Sun down Towns, The Gullah People of Georgia, Florida, & South Carolina, and the Aborigines in

Australia (which is not American History but still important.) This is just the tip of the iceberg, none of which was covered at my time at HCSD. What Black History was covered, was watered down versions of history made easy for the consumption of white students. Moving away from history at HHS, there was always confederate flags allowed to be flown from people trucks and to be worn on pieces of clothing. There was also a white male from the class of 2017 who threatened to bomb the school, as my friends and I recalled, he faced no true repercussions while black and brown students saw high rates of behavioral referrals. I also remember two students who were also in the class of 2017 got into a fight, because a white student said or called a black student the n word. This caused the fight between them. After this fight, the white student, who did start it by saying the n word, faced no repercussions while the black student got suspended. I also had never had one BIPOC teacher at my time in HCSD.

Race: White

Suggestions: Black students should not have to put their body and education on the line for students who use racial slurs. White students who use this language need to face repercussions and it needs to be enforced. Add more Black History into the entire curriculum.

Great starting list of YA Novels: (also include black authors, poets, non-fiction)

<https://www.google.com/amp/s/afomaumesi.com/black-young-adult-novels/amp/>

Good link to start incorporating black history into all subjects:

<https://www.edutopia.org/article/teaching-black-history-culturally-responsive-ways>

Hire more black staff and teachers. Invest in mental health programs and staff for BIPOC students.

Remove police presence at HCSD.

Talk and hold assemblies about racial bias, (covert and overt) racism, microaggressions, xenophobia, prejudice etc.

<https://www.npr.org/sections/ed/2015/04/24/401214280/uncomfortable-conversations-talking-about-race-in-the-classroom>

### **Name: Anonymous**

Graduation: n/a

Your Experience: My Son was repeatedly called a “wetback,” “essay” “illegal” “immigrant” by “friends” who considered this joking. It caused him much embarrassment but as much as I encouraged him to speak out he’d say that these things took place in front of teachers and never were they addressed, so he felt they wouldn’t do anything about it anyway “because they were just joking.”

Race: Black, Latinx

Suggestions: There should be a “Town Hall” where students past and present can share their experiences, training in diversity and how to acknowledge and identify cultural insensitivity. A good read: What they didn't teach in school. Howard Zinn & A peoples History of the United States.

### **Name: Parker**

Graduation: 2027

Your Experience: I didn't think that my friends in Highland experienced racism until my parents helped me understand. I just didn't know because I haven't had to go through it.

Race: White

Suggestions: Black Lives Matter is about trying to help Black peoples Lives. We should be teaching facts about this movement. We should have more black teachers in our school to represent their culture and be role models for all students. Black Lives Matter dosen't mean that all lives don't matter. It just means black lives aren't equal yet.

-Parker

There needs to be education on systemic racism. Documentaries such as 13 really show the history behind our damaged system. You don't know, what you don't know, change starts with education. Our children are going through an unprecedented time between the virus, the movements, the protests, the current political climate and divide... But they are lacking the education that provides them with the ability to cope and make informed decisions. They are learning from tik tok and Twitter and their uninformed parents. We need to take this seriously. Change can happen. Small steps is all it takes.

-Parkers mom

**Name: Anonymous**

Graduation: n/a

Your Experience: Teaching at HSCD

Race: White

Suggestions: Create a diverse faculty and administration now.

Superintendent conferences for staff to understand our racism, bring on the tough dialog and make change.

Look at our referrals to be certain we are not out of balance.

**Name: Michael Malhero**

Graduation: 2017

Your Experience: EXCELLENT PEOPLE, GREAT SCHOOL, NO NEED FOR CHANGE, THIS IS BS.

Nobody said any of this 4 years ago

Race: White

Suggestions: I don't think there needs to be change at all. The people who need to change are the people that haven't been to high school in 3-4 years and are now caring about how the school system works. When we were all there nobody seemed to mention any of this. I am on this because I don't think there needs to be a single thing done to improve HCSD. Former students should mind their business!

**Name: Anonymous**

Graduation: Parent

Your Experience: Lack of diversity within the district was prevalent during my child's years at Highland. My personal experience would be my child being referred to for any culture topics in spanish class or my child being taught direct English into Spanish translations although it isn't grammatically correct because the teacher teaching doesn't truly understand the language nor culture themselves.

Race: Latinx

Suggestions: Both training in cultural diversity for existing faculty and the hiring of minority educators. The change comes from direct experience. Referring to minority students as reference of culture isn't implementing neutrality amongst the students.

**Name: Anonymous**

Graduation: n/a

Your Experience: Mostly in my Experience as a black girl, I was made fun of for not looking the same. Mostly in 7th grade when I started wearing weave. I remember specifically a girl asking to tear it off my head. Then continuing to try and grab it off.

Race: Black

Suggestions: I'd change schools if I could

**Name: Anonymous**

Graduation: Parent, Class of 2026/2027

Your Experience: My children are both in the early half of their schooling but as they both continue through middle school it is crucial they learn a wider variety of history, Americans and foreign, to encompass moments of different cultures and races beyond "black history month" and "women's history month".

Incorporating diversity from LGBTQ+ topics, to the aforementioned cultural diversity will only allow students to broaden their mind - and will in no way cause a negative effect. The negative effect comes as

a result of not learning this varied and rich information young and trying To relearn diversity and cultural inclusion later in life

Race: White

Suggestions:

**Name: Anonymous**

Graduation: 2022

Your Experience: The teachers are racists

Race: Latinx

Suggestions: De white wash the school text books. Stop telling us that you guys don't tolerate racism but gave a girl who said racists things body guards. Just because the teachers are all friends doesn't mean they shouldn't call each other out for doing things. For example a [redacted]'s kid the tall one called a group of black kids the n word with the r and ms [redacted] didn't report it when it happened in her class just because ms. [redacted] and ms. [redacted] are friends. [redacted] told [queer student] to change her sneakers because they had rainbow colored and thought it would be offensive but to who ? The people that are homophobic? Stop tolerating things. Speak out on racism and teach students that racism won't be tolerated and that racism isn't ok and teach the teachers that racism won't be tolerated either.

**Name: Anonymous**

Graduation: n/a

Your Experience: a white student in my class used the n word right in front of me.

Race: Black

Suggestions:

**Name: Sianna**

Graduation: 2018

Your Experience: In my 4 years at HHS, I never once learned about my race's history. The one thing that we went over (in my Spanish class) was Día De Los Muertos. I was not taught about Seneca Village. I was not taught what Juneteenth was. I had to learn about these things on my own. There were classes were I was the only person of my race. I am disappointed in this school district for not teaching me the most important parts of history. I was not taught that MLK was not killed by a gun but instead he was smothered in his hospital room. The government was later found GUILTY of conspiracy to kill him. I'm disappointed that my school district failed me so tremendously.

Race: Latinx

Suggestions:

**Name: Jess**

Graduation: 2022

Your Experience: I've been a student at highland since 2009 and I have seen a lot of things in the district. In elementary school the kids were very exclusive to kids of different colors and weight. In middle school many kids said the n word. groups of kids would say it as a word to refer to people. Many kids. The school is very white so it's shocking so many kids say it when they aren't even black. I was never educated on the true meaning behind it until late of 8th grade but I definitely heard people say it from the start of 6th grade. Teachers and adults have definitely heard kids say it and don't do anything to educate them, but just let it slide. Instead we need to find a solution to educate kids on racism rather than tucking it under the rug and acting like it doesn't exist. Still in my sophomore year of school I witnessed racism during fights white kids would call other kids the n word screaming. The faculty sure as well heard them but they didn't get educated/ in trouble for it. A girl said something about how black people didn't deserve black history month with the student body well knowing she is a racist and still showed up back in school less than a week later. It's uncomfortable being surrounded by that when it's a big part of the school who act like that. Second, the school lacks diversity. Personally being a white student of highland I've never

really had to think about these things but as I become more aware there aren't many teachers who are of color. The faculty is mainly white. Kids my age who go to highland have never once had a teacher who is black. That is shitty to never be have a mentor at school that looks like you. Not once in my 11 years of highland have I ever had a teacher who was black, or Asian, or indigenous. It can tear down a persons confidence to be in a school with the majority of people who don't look like them, especially when it's where they spend 5 days a week 7+ hours a day, not including sports, extracurricular, etc..

Race: White

Suggestions: Educate kids at a young age about all cultures and that people are just people

**Name: Anonymous**

Graduation: 2021

Your Experience: I've had kids show me Holocaust memes because they think they're funny. I've had students go through the Holocaust data base and find people with the same last name to make jokes at me or about me. I've had people say I've never seen a Jew in real life before and people drop quarters near me to see if I'd pick them up based on stereotypes.

Race: White

Suggestions: I don't really know if there's a way to stop the students from being offensive.

**Name: Anonymous**

Graduation: n/a

Your Experience: I have seen many white students (majorly boys) say the n word and i saw a post shared online about black history month in a negative way from a white female.

Race: White

Suggestions: faculty stepping in, listening to students, maybe even an assembly on the importance of respect towards other races.

**Name: Najira Hanson**

Graduation: n/a

Your Experience: In the middle schools kids were asking the black students if they were jigaboos. I was told not to wear black nail polish because I'm already black and dark. This kid was saying nigga in class I wanted to hurt him but instead went to the principal. Him and his friends lied about what he said Bc they were friends with him. The office said it wasn't a big deal because he only said it once. The teacher tried sympathizing with me saying she understands how it is to be black. But she never will because she was never black.

Race: Black

Suggestions: Listen to what kids say. You shouldn't let anyone get away with saying nigger if they are white. This isn't 1930. You guys should teach and bring awareness to racism and discrimination. Instead you give stupid presentations on dumb stuff no one cares about. In middle school I came home crying because I wanted to go to a new school with more black students. No should ever have to go through that. You should also teach the truth and black history for once. I shouldn't have to learn more about black history on Tik Tok than school.

**Name: Anonymous**

Graduation: n/a

Your Experience: Witnessed [REDACTED] [REDACTED] be racist on multiple occasions

Race: White

Suggestions: Better punishments

**Name: Anonymous**

Graduation: n/a

Your Experience: Shit

Race: White

Suggestions: This school promotes rape culture and pedophilia whether you'll admit it or not. Just because it's "policy" doesn't make it right. This school polices underaged girls in what they're wearing and simply just being a women with tits and an ass is "wrong" here. You have older grown up men (ahem [REDACTED]) looking girls up and down to see if what they're wearing is inappropriate or not? Yet you all turn a blind fucking eye when it comes to YOUR STAFF BEING RACIST AND HOMOPHOBIC! That's so crazy to me YOU PROMOTE RACISM HOMOPHOBIA RAPE CULTURE AND PEDOPHILIA whether you'll admit that to yourselves or not. There's even a dress code for elementary kids. Why? Why is that? Do the little underraged 6 year olds distract you that much? But when it comes to one of your staff you seem to not notice. When a white student says something racist towards a black person or minority in general you seem to not notice? Even tho it's very VERY clear that racism is there. Don't say you're an inclusive school cause you're not. There's not ONE black staff member in the high school NOT ONE

**Name: Kayla Fennell**

Graduation: 2021

Your Experience: Being a junior now about to be a senior in highland high school has been ruff dealing with racial issues. Throughout the halls I would be called names like tar, porchmonkey, slave and many more. Not only that but having my hair being pulled by others because "it's too ruff", "slave like" or even not like everyone else's and to me this is absolutely disgusting that this is happening. Even being called a nigger just because of my skin color. No one should be treated like this because of their skin tone. I take pride in being a women of color. I don't go around called whites cracka or Hispanics spicks so why is okay for me AS A BLACK WOMEN BE CALLED A NIGGER. All people have done is make excuses because of "freedom of speech"but like said before there is a difference between hate speech and freedom of speech. You have kids walking around with confederate flags but when someone from the LGBTQ community try to express themselves it's so called "offensive." Being in that school I feel as if I'm fighting a war with the ignorant especially when it comes to adults. Even then the adults are just as bad as the kids. The racism NEEDS TO STOP. No one should have to feel insecure in their own skin.

Race: Black

Suggestions:

**Name: Anonymous**

Graduation: 2020

Your Experience: In my 4 years of High School systematic racism has been present. whether it's because minorities are seen as poor and in don't do well in school. they pay more attention to them especially if they do something wrong whereas if a white person would do it or if they're failing a class they won't do as much, they won't push as much. and give them a referral or a talk with the principal. they give us the wrong kind of attention. the main reason there's police within the district during the school day is because of poc, it's unfair. HHS doesn't welcome everyone of every ethnicity because they treat them differently than the rest.

Race: Latinx

Suggestions: We should have people of color come in, to talk about systemic racism. because believe it or not there's plenty of racist students and faculty members that need to hear what systemic racism is and how it affects poc and others of different races. faculty trainings should be a must. some members don't realize they even do it so that's a big red flag and should be changed. each year there's more and more people of many races, not just white therefore students, teachers and other faculty members should have some kind of training to better prepare them and to treat them as equal, instead of always suspecting of them.

**Name: Jayla Ayala**

Graduation: 2025



Your Experience: I personally haven't experienced anything more than stereotypical remarks towards me and my race, but I have witnessed some of my friends of minorities getting micro aggressions towards them by both students and staff.

Race: Latinx

Suggestions: I think that we should educate the students about racism going on in our district and make a hotline or a place to go when a student experiences racism.

**Name: Sara**

Graduation: 2022

Your Experience: I have seen multiple white boys in our cafeteria scream the n word without Getting in trouble

Race: White

Suggestions: I feel like any one that uses racists words should get iss and be on there permanent record so they know that there is consequences to their actions

**Name: Anonymous**

Graduation: 2026

Your Experience: I have gotten called the n word by one specific kid varies time. And in class that kid also mad a racist comment while we were learning about slavery. And I was to by the sub to sit down I was overreacting. And was told if I didn't sit down I would be sent to the office.

Race: Black

Suggestions: Teach what slavery really is and teach that's black aren't only slaves we are unpowered human with no ability to have a say about what we think.

**Name: Mia**

Graduation: 2021

Your Experience: I have been told I'm not considered black hispanic because i'm half black or half hispanic. I have even seen people saying things they shouldn't say out loud or even to someone else and of course I have stood up and said something because it's not okay especially if you know you aren't supposed to say things like that. I see racism occur all day everyday at HHS.

Race: Black, Latinx

Suggestions: More involvement in things like learning about black history month or learning more about black history and spanish history instead of learning about how columbus got to america.

**Name: Anonymous**

Graduation: 2021

Your Experience: There have been many horrible things I've witnessed but 2 stand out in particular. One girl had posted during black history some very hurtful, vulgar, and derogatory things. She posted and said these things for all to see and even went as far to say f\*ck black history month. countless students went to the principals and guidance counselors. Many students expected a punishment or an apology but the only thing that was done was the girl he did this was given security. the school believed she was in danger from many kids of color because of what she said which is ridiculous. no punishment was ever given. Another incident was in class. a young white male (who is more conservative) decided to scream the N word with hard r in class. No punishment was given either and many found that very disappointing as it shows the staff of the school do not seem to care.

Race: White

Suggestions: Give punishment to those who deserve it. Do not turn a blind eye to things right in front of you.

**Name: Anonymous**

Graduation: n/a

Your Experience: throughout my entire time going to the highland schools, i faced racism in multiple ways. even the simplest "joke" shines through as racism and it will not be tolerated.

Race: Latinx

Suggestions: educate the children and ignorant staff

**Name: Anonymous**

Graduation: n/a

Your Experience: I have had one with another parent and my child had a few.

As I set at a second grade activity with my youngest. I began having a conversation with a parent, that was prompted by the teacher asking how I was holding up the days before Christmas. The teacher knew I was a teacher and the other parent was also. Once I answered, the teacher said , oh I am sure "██████" knows that feeling. So the parent and I start talking about teaching, where she teaches, where I teach, how many years, the grades we have taught so on and so forth. After all off this conversation one would think it was very clear, we were equals on the same battle field. Until she turns back around and says are you sure your not a teachers aid. In that moment for whatever reason she did not think that I could hold the same Credentials as she did. Being Afro American you learn to know when it is because of your skin that you are being double questioned or spoken to a certain way.

One of the first experiences with my child was she had a crush on a white student and I am thinking he may have had one on her ... because one day she came home and told me that the boys older brother told him that he couldn't like her because she was black.

My child has been asked questions like why she is so dark ...was she left in the oven too long.

I had to call a teacher because during a slavery presentation another student referenced my child. My daughter said nothing was said by the teacher at the moment... when I called the teacher stated it was not heard. It was addressed later and the teacher did call me back on the issue.

Race: Black

Suggestions: Highland has not one teacher/ staff of color that I can recall seeing between the three buildings.( Elem. just got an African American woman Security guard and I think a staff member of Asian decent this year) I have noticed that Highland is becoming much more diverse, your buildings should reflect that.

In the years my child has been in school I barely recall seeing Black History month activities or work taught. Please go broader than Martian Luther King and Harriet Tubman. (make this mandatory, all students should have this info.)

All staff should be trained on what micro aggressions are.

When issues affect people within your school community those issues should be address by the superintendent immediately.

Teachers can do book studies as part of their PLC's books dealing with racism as well as books dealing with Trama and children, and bias.

As a district demand a new Social Studies curriculum throughout. In the High school European History should not be taught it should be changed to World History... Euro does not even align with the global exam.

Also at the high school, possibly middle school offer electives that have to do with different cultures .

Every elementary classroom should have books that represent a wide variety of people.

Listen to the Ted Talk The Danger of a Single Story.

**Name: Aliyah Thomas**

Graduation: 2020

Your Experience: -I have been questioned multiple times not only by students, but teachers as well if my hair is real, or is it a wig or a perm or a weave. I've been compared to a poodle because of my hair. My friends and I were labeled as "monkeys" by a student. I've heard students that are not POC use the n-word and teachers did nothing about it but laugh. People always used to look at me along with other black students in class whenever the history of slaves were brought up or even anything that has to do with the past or present upbringings of black people, as if we have something to say about it that the teacher isn't going to say. What verification are you expecting from a child? We know just as much as you do especially at such a young age. Its hard coming to a predominantly white school when you're a person of color and feeling so left out. It feels like a lot of the time you have no teachers to go to that understand the shit you've been through or are still going through. Teachers, would ask ME about black history whilst also TEACHING ME about it. They'd look to me for verification. How does that work??

Race: Black

Suggestions: We need teachers to open their eyes. To understand that the things they've not only said but confined in the school grounds will no longer be acceptable. We have a new generation walking through those doors, and the things that occur in this school can be and are damaging to our youth. You need to understand the difference between stating opinions and stating facts. Protect your students, no matter how different your views are on topics. You're here to teach the youth, teach them the correct things, and not what's in the history books. Those books are white washed and doesn't entail the entire truth. Let the POC a know that you have our backs. Maybe even see if we could get at least a COUNSELOR of color so students can sought out to somebody who understands the struggles in this school and in this country. It's not always peachy when your skins colored, and the students don't always have somebody to reach out to. We need people to stop students when they say things of a racist nature or if they're overtly racist. Don't laugh it off, this shit isn't a joke it's our everyday lives. Defend us and care for us like you do for your own. Thank you

**Name: Anonymous**

Graduation: 2019

Your Experience: A friend of mine was not allowed to make his yearbook photo what he wanted because ██████████ thought it was too "suggestively gay" (while not inappropriate). This was not discriminatory on part of the principal. He knew the school could receive backlash because there is a lot of repressed homophobia in our town.

Race: White

Suggestions: Faculty should allow students to see these things. Students should be encouraged to ask questions. It is the pretending these things don't happen that keep small towns like ours ignorant. The punishment for homophobic and racist acts from students should be met with education. Ultimately students are a product of their environment.

**Name: Anonymous**

Graduation: n/a

Your Experience: I haven't really experienced racism directed to me. But I have heard others make jokes about for example: Mexicans and their association to drugs and thing that like that.

Race: Latinx

Suggestions: Honestly I have no idea what we could do to change things

**Name: Ben Foglia**

Graduation: 2017

Your Experience: Was right before Christmas break. [REDACTED] had everyone leave a piece of paper on their desk. Everyone had to write something nice on everyone's paper. Everyone wrote "Jew" on mine. She called down [REDACTED] who gave a really weird speech and nobody knew what his point was. I brushed it off and never thought much of it, but I probably should've considered it a bigger deal

Race: Middle Eastern / North African, White

Suggestions:

**Name: Anonymous**

Graduation: n/a

Your Experience: During my time in HCS D I've experienced countless racial slurs, racial jokes, and micro aggressions such as giving referrals to students who sag their pants and while colored students were penalized with losing field day and or getting ISS while not POC students where simply just told to "pull up their pants"

Race: Black

Suggestions:

**Name: Julia Purdy**

Graduation: 2016

Your Experience: I graduated in 2016 and while I cannot speak on any racism that took place I'd like to talk about the school curriculum and how we can better tackle issues of racism and discrimination within the school. First and foremost we need to fully listen to the students of color and be prepared to make changes if they are uncomfortable with something or have ideas that can better serve everyone. I think we definitely need to go into depth about slavery more from a younger age to educate students and show them just how bad it was. I remember learning about and seeing disturbing pictures from the holocaust in 7th grade but I don't remember the same thing for slavery. I personally don't remember learning much about slavery at all, at least not enough to make a lasting impact. I think there should be more of a focus on black history as well. One month is not enough to celebrate and educate people about black history. It should become a regular part of the curriculum because black history is American history as well. Maybe there can be a whole separate class dedicated to black history and discrimination and how to deal with it that is mandatory for all students to take. We can't shy away from controversial or uncomfortable topics because that is doing nobody any good and only keeping the oppressed people oppressed. While I haven't seen much racism that I'm aware of during my time at school that does not mean that there wasn't any because I, as well as many other people in Highland, have the privilege to not notice these things as they didn't directly affect me. With that said, if people notice racism and discrimination going on, even small things like racist jokes even if they aren't intended to hurt people, there needs to be fast and strict consequences and it needs to be obvious that this behavior is not tolerated in Highland or anywhere else.

Race: White

Suggestions: I answered a lot of this in my above answer but I do think it would be beneficial for the faculty to train and learn to deal with discrimination first so that they can better teach students how to deal with it correctly. I also think there are some great reading materials out there that should be a requirement for all students. "So you want to talk about race" by Ijeoma Oluo seems like a good book to educate everyone but I have not read the book in it's entirety yet. It could definitely be a book to look into as well as other books and movies that can be shown throughout the school years.

**Name: Anonymous**

Graduation: 2015

Your Experience: I took a class freshman year composed of ~12 students. Sometimes, the class would get out of hand (talking while we were supposed to be doing work, etc) and the teacher would ONLY yell at or discipline black students. Everyone else was just as guilty, but we were white so it didn't matter to him. I remember one time one of the students explicitly called the teacher out for only ever

trying to discipline the two black students. He brushed it off as a joke and we all laughed. I still think about it and regret it to this day. It wasn't funny at all.

Race: White

Suggestions: I Wish I knew :( I feel like the [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] were the only teachers who tried to ever teach anything semi race-related so they'd be good resources

**Name: Anonymous**

Graduation: 2016

Your Experience: From elementary school through high school, there were always instances where students of color were being made fun of because of their race. Throughout my 4 years in high school specifically, I very often heard other students using racial slurs. I can't remember there ever being any support for the students of color or any consequences for those doing the bullying and using racist language.

Race: White

Suggestions:

**Name: Anonymous**

Graduation: 2020

Your Experience: Some of my first experiences started when i first moved to highland. Unlike many of the other students who actually grew up in Highland, i transferred in the middle of my freshmen year, from the city. it was a really hard transition, as i came from a highschool that was extremely diverse to now attending a highschool that had very little diversity and is predominantly white. It was odd, and i was very uncomfortable since my first day. i had so many people constantly point out my accent as well as many people making assumptions about me due to where i came from. Although these slowly died off as the months pasted on, i've spoken to other kids who have transferred from other similar areas who have felt the exact same way as me upon coming to highland. Another thing is that I am an openly Lesbian Women in highland, and ever since coming out, i've literally dealt with countless forms of micro aggression from so many students. When i rode the bus there was a student (who no longer attends highland ) who would continuously throw around the F slur and even the N slur because she knew that my father was a POC. It angered me to my core but i always kept quiet because i felt like no one was going to listen to me. Even during sports, I'd get singled out and treated weirdly due to the fact that I am gay. When i became class president, so many people used the excuse that it was mainly because i was gay and it would be new to highland, and I've gotten countless arguments with people in our school who have invalidated my sexuality MULTIPLE TIMES. I've struggled with that my entire life and to be at school (which for the most part is very accepting ) those select few kids who are known for being homophobic saying things like "pride month shouldn't exist etc" and comparing the rainbow flag to other flags of hate and trying to make you feel bad for being gay is disgusting. And these kids are never called out but instead applauded. Highland opens up a space for many to share opposing viewpoints etc. but what many of the faculty doesn't realize is that yes, so many kids in highland are supportive, accepting, loving etc and there are many teachers who go out of their way to provide a safe space for everyone , but their are some kids who attend highland , that continue to use derogatory slurs to address others and are not afraid to show their hatred or distaste for certain aspects of society whether it be in person or on social media. I have a very thick skin so for me , i've learned to brush it off , but not every kid is like this. Also i really hope Highland brings some change . I'm graduating this year but i want change i don't want kids to have to listen to what i listened to, such as the spanish speaking kids like me, many from places like mexico , puerto rico, Colombia etc, who have to hear republican siding kids getting upset and telling them to return to their countries, which is VERY common. Change in some form needs to happen.

Race: Latinx

Suggestions: One huge thing is that people need to be educated better. So many topics are hidden away from students views because teachers are scared to hurt the feelings of students. no be brutally honest. also take the words of students seriously. if someone comes to tell you they are being harassed or anything if the sort , take it seriously. Also teach some of the faculty to separate beliefs from work

because theirs no reason for a faculty member to be homophobic to a kid while on the clock just because they don't agree with it.

**Name: Anonymous**

Graduation: n/a

Your Experience: While I might not have experienced anything racial per say, I did have 2 teachers while we were at Highland point some things out to me as a parent that didn't feel good. Point out is not the word, but... I had 1 teacher ask if we were Italian in anyway because my son wanted to hug and kiss his friends. The same teacher also made some homophobic comments about another child's parents to me. She also identified several children of color in class that didn't have snacks brought in and told me how she had to feed them. Another teacher we had also made homophobic comments about my son wanting to kiss his "male" friends and she even brought it up at a party we both attended years later. I have also had teachers outside of school say things about children and or their parents to me. It is very uncomfortable to think that just because I am white I am safe to say these things to and it is intimidating when your child is in the district and everyone is related to everyone and you know word will get out if say something. I know my children have been affected by this in this community and that is why we went to private school.

Race: White

Suggestions: Hire a more diverse teaching staff, maybe people from outside this community. Have teachers take sensitivity trainings, have them sign contracts that forbid them from speaking about students and parents to other parents. If teachers know what students might be compromised at home with lack of needs being meant- maybe a team needs to get together to see what they can do to support those kids.

**Name: Alexia Pryce**

Graduation: 2018

Your Experience: Way to many to count. But her are a few. In 7th grade i was called a Nigger by a student who was white. The assistant principal gave me iss for skipping lunch detention. But gave another who i was with 1 extra day of lunch detention. There are many more examples i could point out of my unfair treatment.

Race: Black

Suggestions:

**Name: Victoria Purdy**

Graduation: 2016

Your Experience: I myself do not remember witnessing racism or discrimination in the Highland Central School District for the sole reason that I was not aware of it, not because it did not happen. Being a white person in a predominantly white place causes you to be less observant of discrimination because it is not happening to you. This is where I feel the school system could have helped but did not. We should have been taught black history more than just a quick lesson on slavery or black history month or Martin Luther King day. We should've been taught what being white and black (and a minority) in old America was really like. We should've not only learned more about the history of racism and discrimination, but we should've learned that it is an ongoing battle, that it is still happening today and how to recognize it. I didn't know racism on a large scale still existed until I went to college. If that sounds naive it's because it is and I was. This is where I believe our schools have lacked. An 18 year old privileged white girl should not be able to ignorantly go into the world thinking it is perfect and fair because ignorance is violence in times like these. We should be taught to love and respect and the only way we can truly respect is if we first learn and understand. If we were taught more in school than what I have said than I apologize because I do not remember it. It did not stick, which means it was not enough. We need to do better.

Race: White

Suggestions: A better, more inclusive curriculum as I stated earlier. There are also so many books I am not qualified to recommend because I haven't read them all yet. Find a thread, read them and pick some for the curriculum. I think the figures we praise in text books need to be acknowledged as slave holders and abusers if they were. Text books were written from one perspective but I think it's important for the ones teaching history to know who were the, for lack of a better word, bad guys, and state that to the class. Not a debate. Just acknowledge their wrong doings because, although long dead, these men do not deserve our praise even in the classroom.

**Name: Anonymous**

Graduation: n/a

Your Experience: witness of racism and discrimination

Race: Asian

Suggestions: teach students current events

**Name: Alecia Wilk**

Graduation: 2018

Your Experience: My "experience" with racism at highland central school district cannot be whittled down into one moment. If I had to transcribe every racist memory I have from this school I could probably fill up pages, but even then, some instances would be left out because, as I've realized since distancing myself from this town and going to college, so much of the racism around me hardly registered as what it was because in Highland racism is normal, acceptable behavior. Still, I'll collage a few.

In eighth grade I had a biology teacher who took it upon himself to tell a room full of thirty 13-year-olds that there is a science to black people being faster than white people. His exact explanation has gotten lost on me with time, but the gist was something about Africans living in the heat and therefore having a body-type predisposed to burning calories and being fit, it's as moronic and unsupported as it is nazi-like. The "intellectually inferior, physically superior/natural talent" myth is one of the oldest, most dominant narratives that white supremacy uses against Black people. It was used in American slavery, as it was in British theories about evolution and the degeneration of black people. It was used by nazis under Hitler when Jesse Owens was an Olympian and also by white Americans against the success of Jackie Robinson. And there it was, being taught in your classrooms full of white kids who already knew how to utilize racism against their black peers.

In ninth grade the Ferguson protests were in the news. In my global history class, taught by two white males who were more interested in football than entertaining my questions about the looting of African territories, many students would chatter about the news before class. My teachers would open the discussion letting it consume ten or more minutes of class time and allowing white students to make ignorant racist remarks about black people and violence against them. Even though the teachers said this was a learning moment about current events, they never "corrected" or even reflected on all the uninformed, anti-black statements coming from their students. Sometimes, they espoused them.

Being half black and having naturally curly hair, I had multiple teachers on countless occasions tell me that I looked like I stuck my finger in a socket, that it looked crazy, I was compared to a sheep and a dog. I told myself it was in my head at the time, that I just wasn't the right kind of student, but I always felt overlooked. Faculty didn't take interest in me or my younger sister the way they seemed to take interest in our white friends, even though we both ended up graduating top ten of our class. Teachers and coaches seemed to identify me and my Black or of-color friends as problems of the group, even if their behavior wasn't any different from white kids. We were "talkative/distracted/disruptive/lazy." Racism from student to student was everywhere. White kids said any and all variations of the n-word and specifically targeted black students with it. Any person of a different culture or race had heard a racist joke about it at least once, if not forced to endure it for years. When I was on track, white kids called Black kids "African booty scratchers." Confederate flags were worn on hats and cars, and when me and my peers of color complained about it we were met with shrugs. I could go on and on, but it gets painful, so I hope you get the point.

Race: Black, White

Suggestions:

**Name: Nicola Wilk**

Graduation: 2019

Your Experience: When I was in 7th grade during chorus we were singing a patriotic song for the Scholarship Concert. While practicing singing the song, one student asked if we were allowed to salute at the end of the song. This led to the then teacher to go on a long tangent about respecting the army for "fighting against the Muslims". He then proceeded to talk about how he couldn't understand how Muslims could "preach from a book of hate" which was a very insensitive and ignorant thing to say. Needless to say, I have never forgotten about that moment, nor will I anytime soon.

Race: Black, White

Suggestions: I would definitely require more training in being more accepting and inclusive of diverse students, or just hire a more diverse staff.

**Name: Jeremy Gibson**

Graduation: 2019

Your Experience: I've had numerous experiences with caucasian students saying the n-word around me. I've heard with both the hard r and an a at the end. I've also found that minority students, especially black students, have been punished more severely for offenses than white students. During fights involving students of different races/ethnicities I've noticed that black students get suspended longer and are typically blamed for starting the fights. In my earlier years I noticed that students were allowed to wear clothing and accessories that had the confederate flag as well as having that displayed on their vehicles. This was deeply offensive being a half-black student who's grandmother lived during segregation and fought hard during the civil rights movements. I've also been harassed and bullied for my sexual orientation through high school. I've even been called a f\*ggot for just walking down the hall.

Race: Black, Latinx

Suggestions: Enacting a zero tolerance policy that suspends and even expels students for using slurs and other racist and prejudice behaviors targeted towards those of non white ethnicities, different gender identities, and different sexual orientations. Educating students, especially straight white male students, on their privilege may also help to show students the struggles of others and teach empathy regarding issues of race, sexual identity, gender, etc. Hiring more faculty and educators of different ethnicities and orientations would help minority students feel more comfortable in the school and feel like they have people to talk to who understand their struggles.

**Name: Anonymous**

Graduation: 2020

Your Experience: in 7th grade there was a teacher that targeted a mixed raced student. while the student was probably out of line in ways and should have been reprimanded the teacher took it a step farther to bully and single out the student. she would remove him from class and tell him to complete work in the hall without giving him the materials to do so and not letting him back into the room till the class was over. the teacher would say he's acting like a gang member and would single him out more than anyone else in the class.

in kindergarten there was a latinx student constantly sent to the principals office by my teacher. sometimes for the slightest infraction any 5 year old would do. it seemed that being too loud or getting slightly upset was worthy of getting sent to the principals offices. the student was even sent to the principals office for doing the rock and roll hand gesture to a friend across the hallway once with the teacher saying he would not be allowed to bring 'gang signs' into her class

Race: White

Suggestions:

**Name: Dean Riley**

Graduation: 2018



**Your Experience:** Since attending college and truly reflecting on my time in HCSD - I have realized that our district desperately needs change. Racism is deeply rooted in our schools and community and our country, and until our district is able to admit to being part of the problem then injustices will continue. White privilege is real, yet we never spoke about it. Racism is real yet we pretended it didn't exist in our community. And Black and African history is rich and beautiful yet we never spoke about it. BIPOC students were continually subject to racism and microaggressions. From Asian students being asked where they are really from to Indian students being told they only got into the college they did because of their race to Black students used to validate the Black experience. Our faculty and staff need to do better at teaching our students, our students must be educated on systemic racism, and we all must commit to being anti-racists.

Race: White

**Suggestions:** HCSD should change their curriculum to include teachings on racism, White privilege, and most importantly the Black and African history that extends just the topic of slavery - but goes into depth on the beauty of the African continent as well as Black authors, artists, business men and women, as well as hire a more diverse staff.

**Name: Anonymous**

Graduation: 2017

**Your Experience:** My english teacher in my junior year at HHS is a perfect example of the HCSDs glaring issues with race and diversity. I'd written a paper on cultural appropriation and presented it to the class, after which she pulled me aside (note: I hadn't seen her do the same to any of my other white classmates) and attempted to try to pull the point I'd just made apart. I'd have welcomed constructive criticism, but this was malicious and speaking on something that affects myself as a POC only to be invalidated and ridiculed by one of the most "liberal" teachers at the school is humiliating. However this isn't isolated to the faculty alone. My freshman(?) year global class was marked by an heated argument I got into with a classmate after he made islamophobic comments directed towards me. Our teacher brushed it off with a "hey guys, let's not say things like that," and it was never followed up or touched again.

These are only two of a litany of experiences that I personally have from the HCSD but scarier still, there is not a single POC that I was friends with in the school who didn't have equal (if not more) horror stories to tell. The unchecked racism from the students matched with the faculty's seemingly chosen ignorance and continued negligence results in a learning environment that is not only damaging to its students of color, but white students as well.

Learning in an environment in which you can throw around racial slurs and treat POC as lesser with no repercussions creates racist adults. White students who learn this kind of behavior to be socially acceptable go on to continue (and oftentimes worsen) this behavior. "Liberal" "woke" teachers who throw out racism (sometimes overtly, sometimes as microaggressions) like candy to students of color go on to create a generation of students who believe that being an ally and being "woke" is exactly that - microaggressions and a blatant disregard for real experiences of POC.

The HCSD has and continues to fail its students on a massive scale. It is in no way supporting its students of color or preparing any of its students, white or otherwise, on how to have a conversation about (let alone deal with) race in today's world.

Race: Asian

**Suggestions:** - diversity training / anti-bias training  
- holding students/faculty accountable?  
- i mean

**Name: Celia Gottlieb**

Graduation: 2017

**Your Experience:** My time at Highland was characterized by confederate flags, racial slurs and anti-Semitic comments. I watched as young girls of colors were villainized for the cut of their clothing while white boys puffed their chests, to display their confederate flag shirt of the day. These boys not only wore these shirts daily but also flew these flags behind their trucks. They took specific care to point to their

shirts and flags when passing students of color, queer students and non-binary folx. My junior year one of these boys would put his face in mine, close enough that I could practically taste his spit. He would ask "You got a problem with my shirt jew-girl? I don't care, I can do whatever I please." He could do whatever he pleased because Highland is the school of the white man. I never felt safe, accepted or encouraged to succeed-- all as a cis, then closeted, white woman. I heard the n word roll of the tongue of these same white men on a daily basis. I watched as sports teams passed the word around as if it were the ball they were meant to throw. I watched their POC teammates shrink into the background. I learned more from my teachers about race via their actions than by the content of their teaching. I learned that the students who did not look like the teachers were naughty. A majority of the kids deemed "bad" were non-white and always under a watchful eye that operated under a suspicion of guilt. These actions were informed by racial bias and in the classroom setting they taught myself and my peers how to live by that racial bias. I spent more time in assemblies that led the school in school wide prayer than talking about systemic racism. I heard more about Christopher Columbus than I did about any native culture and the ways in which their bodies and stories are erased. Black folx were never celebrated, their achievements never taught. There were only conversations on slavery and its non-truthful end. It is shameful. These issues will never be mitigated if not addressed by the school at the administrative level.

Race: White

Suggestions:

## Recommendations to the Board of Education

1. Administrators, teachers, and support staff need **to participate in racial sensitivity, bias recognition, and anti-racist training**. This training needs to be conducted by an **external group**. Further, administrators need to participate in **separate and more extensive training** so as to know how to navigate issues of race, discrimination, and exclusion that happen under their authority. This includes teachers' use of racial slurs in the classroom setting which multiple students reported. There should be no use of racial slurs regardless of the context. **Sports coaches and teams** must also participate in trainings that will be administered as compulsory. These trainings must occur annually;

2. An **ad-hoc Advisory committee** to the Board must be created to **evaluate and support the District's evolving Racial Equity Initiative** in accordance with the Board of Education's purview and legal authority. While the Board is legally empowered to enact policy changes that shape a more equitable environment, the integrity of these changes depends on the affirmative and direct involvement of those with insight into and expertise around inequity. A failure to address this important issue represents an abdication of your sworn oath and a violation of the District's Guiding Principles. This board shall focus on the immediate priorities as indicated below. This board should include a BOE member, community members, current middle and high school students, instructional staff, non-instructional staff and 3 administrators;
3. Organize an annual **speaker series with notable black speakers** that not only discuss issues of race and equity and the manifestation of microaggressions in bullying but also act to inspire students of color. With few teachers and staff members of color, students of color do not see people who reflect their identities in positions of power within the district;
4. Inviting successful speakers of all races, creeds, genders and sexual identities to speak at the school for one day is insufficient. The school needs to **actively participate in anti-racist teachings in the classroom setting**. We encourage the creation of an **African American or Black History course** as is seen at New Paltz;
5. A more intersectional curriculum is insufficient. Highland must also **seek more diverse hires** not only in their faculty but also their staff. This includes a **counselor of color**;
6. Institutionalize semiannual and ongoing **community conversations and workshops to analyze data and feedback from students of color** on their perceptions of race in Highland, their needs, and instances of discrimination/targeting;
7. The school **must issue a public statement and stance on racial equity** . This statement should be evaluated by a racial equity and inclusion ad-hoc committee. Highland's website makes clear that issues of equity are not a priority. There are no **equal opportunity employer messages** prominently displayed on the website. The only information regarding race, equity, and discrimination directs you to NYS websites on DASA and FERPA. Clearly, the school is not committed to addressing these issues. Administrators and the B.O.E. must lead by example in changing the culture at Highland by publicly displaying these messages;
8. Adopt an **explicit policy on racial slurs and teacher reporting** of their use, this cannot just be addressed on a case by case basis. There needs to be direct policies in place for teachers to enforce that combat the normalized use of racially charged language. This must be a direct and clear policy on language use and reporting;

9. An **external review of curricula** must be conducted by an accreditation body. Internal evaluations of curricula by the very teachers who develop the curricula are inadequate and riddled with personal bias. We implore that this shift includes the **cutting of AP European History in favor of AP World History**. Highland's Eurocentric curriculum that focuses on the colonizers and not the colonized is exclusionary and aids in upholding values rooted in white supremacy;
10. "Columbus Day" practices and messaging must be replaced with "**Indigenous Peoples Day**" for this is stolen land;
11. A **review of the Code of Conduct** as it relates to issues of race, gender identity and sexual identity must be administered. This includes a breakdown of dress code violations on the basis of race and gender identity. We must eliminate policies on hats that are explicitly discriminatory. Further, the non-specific language of the Dress Code as it pertains to "vulgar dress" is far too vague and leaves immense latitude for the targeting of students of color. This review should be done by the racial equity and inclusion ad-hoc committee.