



Personal Reflections

9/25/2019

Dear IMSA Family,

I write you with a heavy heart. Our IMSA community suffers from the same ills affecting our entire American society where hate, bias, and racial acrimony have replaced love, acceptance, tolerance, and inclusion.

An incident occurred on September 17, 2019 in Room A108 in IMSA's main building. This is a student lounge area referred to as "1508."

Ms. Dana Ginnett, Associate Director of Student Life, and Dr. Adrienne Coleman, Director of Equity and Inclusion, were informed that an unknown person tied a pink piece of cloth around a bronze skinned "Barbie-like" doll's throat, and pinned it up from a cork-board in the student lounge.

There is no place for hate crimes at IMSA. We take this matter very seriously.

We have been reviewing the videotapes of the incident and have begun to investigate the matter. As of the writing of this Personal Reflection, we do not yet know who is responsible for this incident. Please know we responded swiftly to this incident by establishing a crisis response team, which included reaching out to local authorities. On page 32 of our **Student Handbook**, we include these types of events as "bias incidents." We also refer to this type of incident as a hate incident, specifically "an act that demonstrates prejudice against the victim's actual or perceived race, color, gender, sexual orientation, ethnic origin, religion, ability and/or political affiliation."

Below are the actions we have taken as of the writing of this Reflection:

- Ms. Ginnett and Dr. Coleman removed the doll after being notified of the incident on September 17 at about 10:30 a.m. and addressed approximately 10 IMSA students who were in the room at the time of removal.
- Ms. Ginnett began to work with our Security Office to review the video recordings and investigate the matter through student interviews.
- Dr. Coleman and other staff are working with Multicultural Advocates and other student leaders in each of the halls to facilitate a discussion with students on the evening of Thursday, September 26.
- Ms. Ginnett informed me of the incident on the afternoon of Friday, September 20 and the decision to close down A108.
- Room A108 (aka 1508) was closed on the morning of Monday, September 23.
- Ms. Katie Berger, Chief Student Affairs Officer, and Ms. Traci Ellis, Chief Human Resources Officer and Chief Equity Officer, sent an email to parents and students on Monday, September 23, 2019 just before 8:30 p.m. Subsequently, on Tuesday, September 24, at about 6:30 a.m., they sent it to staff, including faculty, describing the incident as involving "a black doll with a noose around her neck hanging in 1508, an area



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of campus that is meant to be a safe and inclusive space in which students have fun, relax, converse and otherwise unwind with friends. The space is now closed until further notice, as it is no longer a place where students feel welcome or safe."

- Someone sent Ms. Berger's email to the Daily Herald, which published an online article at 10:30 p.m. on September 23.
- Our Security Chief, Mr. Willie Mayes, notified Aurora Police Department (APD) of the incident. The APD was on campus on September 24 interviewing Dana and Adrienne to complete their report.
- I called an all-hands meeting with IMSA staff, including faculty for mid-day, September 24, to provide updated information and IMSA's response plan.
- On September 24, I notified our Board of Trustees and our local elected legislators of the incident and actions taken.
- I have directed Student Life, in the future, to inform me of any bias incident as soon as it occurs.

Over the past week, I have corresponded with several parents who have asked me to assure them that their sons and daughters will not encounter bias or discrimination at IMSA ever again. I wish I could do so.

As the ***Hate at School Report*** states, "Something ugly is happening in America's schools." Unfortunately, as much as we refer to IMSA as a bunker, we are not immune to our greater society's influence.

IMSA reflects our communities. Over the past years, we have not ignored these problems. We have confronted them head on. We have had a robust education program for students and adults. We are planning to have conversations in all the halls this week. Moreover, two years ago, the Board of Trustees passed **my proposed equity and excellence policy**.

In our Board-approved Equity and Excellence Policy, we established a vision for our Academy as one that recognizes and acknowledges the historical underrepresentation and marginalization of culturally, linguistically and economically diverse groups, both universally, and particularly, in STEM education and professions.

We are committed to creating a diverse, inclusive community of global citizens who can realize their full potential, and execute our mission to advance the human condition, through a model of equity and excellence. Along with IMSA's **core beliefs**, we believe we have the foundation for moving forward to bring about love, acceptance, tolerance, and inclusion at IMSA. This year, IMSA staff is engaged in developing and implementing a comprehensive equity and excellence action plan, including providing educational opportunities for all staff, including faculty.

I want to end on a somber note. The ***Hate at School Report*** included the following anecdotes



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and statements, which should serve as a call to action for all of us who believe in fighting hate and seeking justice for the most vulnerable members of our society.

- Three years ago—during and immediately after the presidential campaign—we documented a surge of incidents involving racial slurs and symbols, bigotry and the harassment of minority children in the nation's schools. We called this phenomenon the "**Trump Effect**," because it appeared that children were emulating the **racist, xenophobic and coarse language** Donald Trump was using on the campaign trail.
- In New York, a middle school student writes in a textbook that he will lynch the black husband of a white teacher.
- In Illinois, white elementary students call black students apes and monkeys.
- In Minnesota, a middle school student tells a Latinx child that his mother should be in jail with all the illegal immigrants.
- In Massachusetts, a 10-year-old Muslim girl gets a note saying, "You're a terrorist. I will kill you."
- In Oklahoma, a fifth-grader draws a swastika and writes "white power" on his hand.
- In Washington, an educator stated, "A student taped a piece of paper with a swastika on my classroom wall. This was a couple days after the shooting at the Tree of Life synagogue, and I am Jewish."

As the ***Hate at School Report*** states, "Something ugly is happening in America's schools."

I derived, perhaps, my current favorite definition of "social justice" recently from my readings and prayers of the Book of Common Prayer (The Episcopal Church), which I'm using in my personal devotions during this season in my life. The prayer is from "Various Occasions, #21, 'For Social Justice'." The prayer reads in part, "Almighty ... grant us grace fearlessly to contend against evil and to make no peace with oppression." From this prayer, I derive the following definition of social justice, "fearlessly contending against evil and making no peace with oppression."

Please join me persistently fighting for social justice!

Respectfully,

José M. Torres, Ph.D.

President