

# AUHSD Board adopts new policy on racial equity, interdistrict transfers still contentious



Photo Pippa Fisher

A crowd gathers Aug. 4 in front of the AUHSD office in support of interdistrict transfers.

By Sophie Braccini

In the wake of the tragic death of George Floyd and the resulting conscious awakening of racial inequity and biases, parents and students demanded that the Acalanes Union High School District revise its equity policy. A group including students, parents and teachers, led by AUHSD Associate Superintendent Amy McNamara, worked over the summer to have a new policy in place for the start of the school year. Approved at the beginning of August, the policy's three main topics addressed are: a new code of conduct, a new bias incident reporting, and diversifying the curriculum.

But a group of students, graduates, and other stakeholders in the

AUHSD are asking for the board to restore the interdistrict transfer policy that was suspended in 2018. Their concern is that without it, the local high schools will remain segregated, and diversity and inclusion will suffer.

The governing board believes that addressing the needs of all district students requires a commitment to racial equity and that race needs to cease to be a reliable predictor of student achievement. McNamara added that it is essential that the district interrupts institutional racism in its programs and activities. Ellide Smith, Campolindo Parents Club Diversity and Inclusion (DNI) committee chair, stated that the Campo group, along with the equivalent groups at the

other AUHSD school sites were very influential in the formation of this new policy.

The new code of conduct prohibits racial slurs, epithets, symbols, and other forms of racist speech. To enact this policy the district is putting into place a bias or bullying reporting system that any student can activate, anonymously or not. If the offended party provides his or her name, there will be an immediate follow up and support system provided by staff. Clear and timely consequences are also defined for infringement of the new code. Consequences include no more participation in sports and clubs, and no more letters of recommendation for college.

Special attention will be paid to social media, on and off campus, and students will be informed about the consequences of inappropriate posts.

The other policy change adopted by the AUHSD involves revising curriculum and instructional materials to accurately reflect perspectives of the racial and ethnic diversity among students. The historical Eurocentric curricular and course offerings' institutional bias will be examined and addressed.

Specific classes, training, and seminars are being offered to all students to examine racial identity, white privilege and institutional racism. Discussions started in the first week of school with teachers trained by Dr. Lori Watson, equity transformation specialist. McNamara hopes to also engage the parents through the wellness group and parents' groups so the conversations can continue at home.

Smith noted that the new policy is a step in the right direction. She adds that the next step is properly informing and transparently taking action in the spirit of this new policy. This is an area that Smith says many feel has not always been the district's strongest suit. She is glad that what this policy does is allow parents and the community to hold the district and the high schools accountable.

The district also committed to hiring a diverse staff reflecting the stu-

dent racial and ethnic demographics, however the Acalanes Union Coalition for Transfer Students (AUCTS) is saying that without reinstating the interdistrict transfer, this new equity policy is pointless.

The group of AUCTS supporters gathered at the AUHSD office Aug. 4 to ask the board to reexamine the interdistrict transfer policy that was abolished in 2018. Superintendent John Nickerson explained that the policy that allowed for a number of students from other districts to ask to join the AUHSD had to be canceled for budgetary reasons. About 50 transfer students at the time were part of Miramonte and Campolindo high schools. The AUCTS argued that ending the policy did not create any savings and that asking for it to be reinstated to fill schools to capacity would not cost anything to the district, while it would enrich the high school experience, exposing students to a more realistic picture of the American culture, outside the Lamorinda bubble.

The board members unanimously approved the new policy but rejected the idea of reinstating interdistrict transfers at this time, since the change would not be effective before the 2021-22 school year. They committed to reexamining the topic but would not decide when it would come back to the board.

Smith explained that the DNI parents group does not have an official stance on interdistrict transfers and that it will be an agenda item on their next general group forum to discuss. Her personal opinion is that she is against any policy that perpetuates institutional or systemic racism and discrimination, but she adds that the data that she has received from the district has been murky and that it is a complex problem with no easy solution.

The AUCTS has promised to stay on this topic and to work with the board to start the conversation again in the fall. In the meantime, the group is polling students and parents to gauge their support.

## In Memory

### Bradford Pace Whittaker

November 23, 1949 – June 14, 2020

Resident of Moraga



Following an incredibly brave four-and-a-half-year battle with pancreatic cancer, Brad Whittaker, aged 70, passed away at home with his loving wife Sally, adored daughter Cary, and ever faithful companion Duke by his side. Brad never complained and will forever be remembered for his upbeat, positive spirit, love of family, loyalty to friends, and warm sense of humor.

Born the morning before Thanksgiving in 1949, it's no wonder that Brad had an affinity for pumpkin pie with loads of whipped cream. He spent a happy childhood in Lafayette, the third of four children born to Robert Austin Whittaker and Jane Pace Whittaker. Growing up Brad relished his family trips to Mendocino (especially the Donut Shop in Fort Bragg), enjoyed horseback riding and caring for the

Whittaker horses, looked forward to fun Sierra visits in Twain Harte, and had terrific memories as a Scout in Lafayette Troop 204.

In 1962, a fortuitous family move to the Sacramento area brought the Whittakers to Carmichael, where Brad would eventually graduate from La Sierra High School. Not only would Brad make lifelong friends in this new school, but at the age of 16 he met his future wife, 15-year-old Sally Ryland. As their relationship progressed, it was no coincidence that Brad followed Sally to the University of California at Berkeley and then also worked at the UC Berkeley Alumni camp, the Lair of the Bear. Brad fit right in at the Lair, and his exploits as Camp Blue Head Cook were epic. These summers, along with his time as a member of Phi Kappa Sigma fraternity, forged lasting friendships and amazing college memories—Go Bears!

Upon graduating from CAL in 1973 with a B.S. in Business Administration, Brad did some traveling and worked at a number of diverse companies. Ultimately, he settled down finding his niche in sales and later, specifically in printing. Along the way, Brad married his high school sweetheart Sally in 1981, bought a home in the idyllic town of Moraga, and shortly thereafter started a family. A son, Reed Austin, was joyously welcomed in 1984, and then a sweet daughter, Cary Glenn, was born in 1988. Brad was a devoted dad and loved his kids dearly. As they grew, he was busy each weekend driving from swim meet to soccer field, baseball diamond to tennis court, and finally, from rugby match to volleyball tournament. Brad also juggled his own athletic pursuits. At age 39 he joined the Orinda RoadRunners, a welcoming running club that ironically ended every run with coffee and donuts. Brad ran at the crack of dawn five or six mornings a week, entered marathons, and thoroughly enjoyed the group's camaraderie.

No matter how hectic life was, Brad always made sure his family vacationed each summer at the Lair of the Bear. Just as he and Sally had loved their Blue and Gold camp experience, it soon became a shared passion for Reed and Cary. For some, Disneyland may be the happiest place on Earth, but for the Whittakers—it was the Lair. The family spent 17 straight years in Camp Gold's tent #36 and later, both kids were proud to become Lair staffers—just like their folks.

Clearly, Brad never forgot his scouting roots or the thrill of cooking huge quantities of Lair food. In 2002 when Reed's Troop 212 needed a head cook at Camp Timberwolf, Brad was more than happy to help. Working with a sensational group of Scout moms, the kitchen crew sliced and diced to Brad's favorite country music. The Dixie Chicks were blasted from the mess hall, as his team prepared more than 33,000 camp meals over the course of nearly two decades. Sysco, as Brad was aptly nicknamed, volunteered countless hours at Timberwolf, served on the Camp Timberwolf Board, and truly loved every minute.

Brad is survived by his wife of 39 years, Sally, daughter Cary, brother Bob Whittaker, sisters Christie Gore and Pam Dunckelmann, as well as many in-laws, nieces, nephews, and cousins. He was predeceased by his parents Austin and Jane, and his deeply missed son Reed, tragically killed in 2013. A celebration of life will be held at a future date when all those who loved Brad are able to gather together in remembrance of a genuinely good guy.

The family suggests memorial gifts be made to Alameda County Community Food Bank, 7900 Edgewater Drive, Oakland, Camp Timberwolf, in care of Moraga Valley Presbyterian Church, and Rescue One Foundation, 1280 Moraga Way, Moraga.

## As seen in Lafayette...



A blowout from a PG&E transformer for a high power line caused a fire Aug. 15 at the intersection of Glen and N. Thompson in Lafayette. Neighbors attempted to extinguish the flames before firefighters arrived, according to property owner Lucy Beck.

Photo courtesy Lucy Beck

## As seen in Moraga...



Moraga-Orinda Fire District personnel responded Aug. 16 to a vegetation fire located on the Rheem Boulevard hillside near Saint Mary's College. Photo provided John Garvey