

## **Fieldston Students of Color Demand Action against Bias, Bigotry, and Racism on Campus**

### ***A Spark to Action:***

After the public discovery of videos featuring a number of Fieldston high school students using racist, homophobic, and misogynistic language in a hateful and targeted way, Fieldston's culture of bias and hate towards students of color and other marginalized groups became undeniably clear to the entire community. While the videos themselves and the questionable disciplinary decisions that followed have caused much pain and suffering for students of color, our focus now is to confront the racism and intolerance within our community that has allowed such hate to manifest itself. Because such behavior is not exclusive to the Ethical Culture Fieldston School, we call upon students, families, and educators everywhere to support our call for action.

While Fieldston prides itself on its dedication to diversity, ethics, and progressivism, it has failed to eliminate the emotional trauma and harassment faced by its students of color and other marginalized groups daily. Our struggle today is not only for ourselves but for the students who came before us and the students to come. Now is the time for us to step up and demand change.

Our lock-out is a peaceful protest of our institution's failure to adequately acknowledge and address systemic bias, bigotry, and racism at ECFS. We have intentionally chosen to lock out Fieldston's administrative building, using only our bodies as barricades, as a means of forcing the Board of Trustees and our administration to purposefully work with us to address our demands. For too long, reform surrounding these issues has been left unprioritized. We are no longer willing to let the necessary changes be pushed to the sidelines.

Therefore, we ask you, our administration, our classmates, our families, our alumni, and our community: *Will you join us in our struggle or sit back and watch?*

### **4 Demands for Immediate Action in Light of Recent Incidents**

Fieldston's Student Handbook states that the administration is responsible for enforcing the Code of Conduct "with consistency, fairness, firmness and politeness." Under the Code of Conduct, harassment is a major offense and is defined as "... offensive behavior that intimidates or demeans an individual or group based upon ... race ... ." With respect to the recent events, ECFS' administration has failed to enforce the rules and regulations pertaining to harassment under Fieldston's Code of Conduct and, as a result, is perpetuating the harm and discomfort of Fieldston students.

Agreeing to these demands is the only immediate way to rectify the administration's long-term failure to adequately enforce the rules and regulations outlined in Fieldston's Student Handbook and restore a feeling of safety on campus for all students.

## **16 Demands for Immediate Long-Term Improvements at ECFS**

United in our campaign, #studentsofcolormatter, our demands aim to initiate long-term improvements within the present-day Fieldston community.

**1. Changes to the Disciplinary Committee (DC) at Fieldston:** We demand the permanent members of the Disciplinary Committee (DC) propose the following amendments to the DC procedures which can then be ratified by a majority vote from student government as outlined in the Fieldston Student Handbook:

- a. Implement clear consequences for the use of slurs and derogatory language. Without definite consequences, students believe their use of such language will go unpunished.
- b. Provide the ability for students to represent themselves in the DC meetings pertaining to incidents in which they are directly targeted.
- c. Implement a disciplinary process for students who were accomplices to incidents that go before the DC (ie. if a student records a video or is complicit or complacent in a problematic situation they must also go in front of the DC). Our culture of bias towards students of color and other marginalized groups is largely caused by students' unwillingness to stand up to problematic language and actions. We must force our community to hold each other accountable.

**2. Student Representation on the ECFS Board:** We demand the Board of Trustees allocate two seats for student representatives. Our Board of Trustees holds immense power at our institution, yet its composition and agenda are unknown to the student body. In an attempt to increase transparency and communication we feel it is important that two students be allowed to sit in on board meetings to represent student concerns and communicate the Board's agenda to the rest of the student body. The two students will be nominated in a special election at the end of their sophomore year, serving from the beginning of their junior year until their graduation. *We understand legal concerns of confidentiality on the Board and therefore do not expect our representatives to sit in on certain conversations.*

**3. Racial Bias Training:** We demand that all faculty, staff and administrators attend racial bias training yearly from an organizations like Courageous Conversations. These programs engage entire communities and foster the positive transformation of beliefs and actions so "people of all races can achieve at their highest levels and live their most empowered and powerful lives."

14. **Hiring of an Ombudsperson:** We demand the hiring of an ombudsperson on campus to allow students and faculty to speak freely to a neutral arbiter without fear of retaliation.

15. **Protection of Faculty for Speaking Out:** Our faculty should not face any unwarranted retribution for speaking freely in support of students. Fieldston faculty, especially our faculty of color, constantly advise us on academic struggles and social concerns and aid us in navigating life in a predominantly white institution. Most students of color, would not still be at Fieldston without the consistent support and advocacy from our teachers and faculty of color. While many of our faculty of color want to support us during times like these, many are limited by valid and legitimate fears of punishment and termination from the administration. Whether directly stated or subtly implied, fear-mongering is unacceptable from an administration that values progressive learning and teachers' rights. We demand that you officially state that faculty who speak freely in support of any marginalized students will not be punished.

16. **Implement a New Reporting System:** We demand the development and implementation of a reporting system for all incidents of bias, bigotry, and racism on campus. All incidents, regardless of physical evidentiary support, must be recorded. In light of recent events, it has become clear that these are not isolated incidents. Derogatory language and intentionally harmful behavior are rampant within our community; the absence of a system for reporting and recording these incidents means many of the students involved go unpunished.

**In Closing,** we find it necessary to clarify to whom our demands are intended: the ECFS Board of Trustees, the Head of School and the Assistant Heads of School. While the problems we seek to reform are institutional faults, we believe the individuals in these positions must be held accountable for the institution's failure to enact meaningful change. Since the 1950s, Fieldston students have sat-in, locked-out and protested this failure. We are here again to ask our entire community of students, faculty, parents, alumni and the press to hold the Board of Trustees and higher administration accountable for addressing all of our demands and creating meaningful change. The pain and suffering of students of color at the ECFS is real. Believe us and support us.