



May 12, 2022

Ms. Danielle Singh  
Principal  
Janney Elementary  
4130 Albemarle St NW  
Washington, DC 20016  
[Danielle.Singh@k12.dc.gov](mailto:Danielle.Singh@k12.dc.gov)

*Sent via email*

Dear Principal Singh:

I am an attorney at the Foundation Against Intolerance & Racism (FAIR), a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to advancing civil rights and liberties and promoting a common culture based on fairness, understanding, and humanity. We have more than 100 chapters and tens of thousands of members nationwide, including in the District of Columbia. Our website, [fairforall.org](http://fairforall.org), can give you a fuller sense of our identity and activities.

We write in response to an [incident report](#) submitted to FAIR on May 12 through our transparency website, [fairtransparency.org](http://fairtransparency.org), regarding Janney Elementary. That report states, in pertinent part:

A public elementary school in Washington, D.C., gave children as young as 4 a lesson on “anti-racism” that asked them to identify racist members of their family. “If you are a white person, white privilege is something you were born with and it simply means that your life is not more difficult due to the color of your skin,” the “Fistbook for Kids” explains. “Put differently, it’s not your fault for having white privilege, but it is your fault if you choose to ignore it.” The “Fistbook for Kids” says anti-racism “isn’t a spectator sport” but requires “being loud, uncomfortable, confrontational and visible to ensure change is made.” A series of questions in the book asks children, “Where do you see racism in yourself? This requires true soul-searching. Be real with yourself, don’t feel guilt/shame and own it. It’s the first step in becoming an anti-racist.”

The report includes a link to a [news story](#) published on May 2. According to that story, Janney Elementary held a presentation called “Anti-Racism Fight Club” for students in pre-kindergarten through third grade. Those students were provided with a booklet titled, *Anti-Racism Fight Club Fistbook for Kids*, to which the news story links. The booklet contains some positive statements, such as the importance of equal treatment and embracing our differences. However, it also contains many concerning generalizations and attributes skin color to behavior and beliefs. For example, the booklet claims that “white privilege” exists virtually everywhere, “white” people benefit “in almost every instance,” and “white” people “walk around with an invisible force field” and “hold all of the power in America.” The

booklet also teaches that “being color blind is a bad idea” and it is racist to wish to speak about topics other than race. Additionally, it asks children to identify which of their family members are racist and to develop a strategy “for dealing with them.”

As an advocate for pro-human antiracism, FAIR respects educators who undertake efforts to create positive change and greater fairness. There can be no question of past and present injustices committed in this nation. However, instruction that attempts to remedy prejudice should not itself further prejudice or disregard the civil rights and individuality of others. Title VI of the Civil Rights Act prohibits federally funded programs (including public schools) from discriminating or creating hostile environments based on skin color. 42 U.S.C. § 2000d, d-4a(2); *Tolbert v. Queens College*, 242 F.3d 58, 69-70 (2d Cir. 2001). Conduct that is objectively and subjectively hostile or abusive based on skin color, including “discriminatory intimidation, ridicule, and insult,” violates the Civil Rights Act. *Harris v. Forklift Sys., Inc.*, 510 U.S. 17, 21 (1993).

Here, the “fistbook” teaches children as young as age four that, simply because of the color of their skin and nothing else, they have “privilege,” are justifiably blamed if they “ignore it,” receive unwarranted benefits “in almost every instance,” “hold all of the power” in the nation, and “walk around with an invisible force field.” It is also clear from the book’s language—“fight club,” “fists,” “throat punching,” “curb stomping,” and “choking”—that these assumed attributes are so repulsive and monstrous that children must engage in battle to eliminate them. The book also badgers children to locate racism within themselves and their beloved family members, implying (if not outright stating) that they are inherently racist because of their skin color, and if they do not see it, they are simply wrong or dishonest. Furthermore, it is our understanding that the ideas in the “fistbook” were presented not as one opinion to critique (to the extent primary schoolers are even able to provide critical analysis), but as the truth. These are very young children. It is difficult to see how such instruction upon vulnerable, trusting, and undeveloped minds could not be deemed hostile, as well as unconstructive and dehumanizing.

FAIR believes in antiracism programs in which all students are treated with equal respect and dignity, and none is made to feel demeaned, subordinated, or categorized based on skin color or other immutable traits. The “fistbook” does the opposite, assuming racist behavior and engendering feelings of shame and guilt in young students for no reason other than the color of their skin.<sup>1</sup> We urge Janney Elementary to reconsider the propriety of uncritically presenting the “fistbook” to its primary school students.

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<sup>1</sup> According to the report, the presentation and book contained a fair amount of artifice, telling children not to feel guilt or shame while also instructing them that their skin color confers obnoxious qualities upon them and they are at fault if they deny it and do not fight to change themselves (and their family).

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We would like to give Janney Elementary an opportunity to respond. Please let us know within the next five business days if you intend to do so.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'L. Kim', with a stylized, cursive script.

Letitia Kim

Managing Director of the Legal Network

Foundation Against Intolerance & Racism

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