

DATE: January 20, 2022

TO: Doug Hood, Interim Superintendent
Camas School District

FROM: Gay Selby, Administrator Consultant
ESD 112

RE: **Investigation of Allegation of Racial Slurs from Camas High School Student Section during Girls' Basketball Games (Junior Varsity & Varsity) Camas High School versus Benson High School (BHS) on December 10, 2021**

**Violation of Camas High School Code of Conduct: Harassment (Camas School District Policy 3207),
Page 28**

I was asked by the Interim Superintendent of the Camas School District to investigate an incident of alleged racial slurs that occurred Friday, December 10, 2021, at Camas High School (CHS) during junior varsity and varsity girls' basketball games with Benson High School (BHS). The investigation focused on the following:

Allegations by BHS Coach, Eric Knox, that racial slurs, including the "N-word" were directed by CHS students in the bleachers, toward BHS players, on the court (his letter is attached).

Interviews with CHS students, CHS administrators and supervisors, CHS parents and supporters, referees, the BHS coach, and BHS players.

Two videos of the CHS-BHS girls' varsity basketball game (no video available of junior varsity game) and newspaper articles, including the *Camasonian* (CHS school newspaper) article, and social media posts.

Review of any applicable policies and handbooks (CHS Code of Conduct).

Review of applicable emails.

Camas High School Code of Conduct (Camas School District Policy 3207), p.28

Harassment can take many forms and can include bullying, slurs, comments, rumors, put-downs, jokes, innuendoes, unwelcome compliments, cartoons, pranks, and/or other electronic, verbal or physical conduct relating to an individual which (1) have the purpose or effect of creating and intimidating, hostile, or offensive working or learning environment; (2) have the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual's work performance or education; or (3) otherwise unreasonably affects an individual's employment or education opportunities.

WIAA Rules

Chants and yells need to remain positive and in support of your own team. It is not allowed to use negative chants directed at the opposing team or officials involved in the contest. You cannot direct communication using an opposing player's name or jersey number.

INTERVIEWS:

CHS Athletic Director
CHS Principal
CHS Girls' Assistant Basketball Coach
CHS Cheerleader Advisor
CHS Cheerleaders (4)
Referees (3)
CHS Players (3)
CHS Parents and Supporters
CHS Students (28, not including cheerleaders and players)
Non-Camas High School Student
BHS Varsity Coach
BHS Players (2)
WIAA Executive Director

Diagram of Camas High School Gymnasium and Commons:

All students, parents and other spectators were seated on the northwest side of the gymnasium. If one was to stand on the court and look toward the bleachers, the CHS students would be at the left side of the bleachers, parents/supporters most likely in the middle section, and the Benson High School parents/supporters on the right side of the bleachers. The teams were on the southeast side of the court. The BHS teams were across from the CHS student section and the CHS teams were across from the Benson parents/supporters. The scorer's table and game announcer were at a table between the two teams.

The Commons is highlighted because it is the area where the Benson High School varsity players "warmed-up" prior to entering the gymnasium for their game.

See diagram attached.

Background:

On Friday, December 10, 2021, CHS Girls' Basketball Teams (junior varsity and varsity) hosted the BHS Girls' Basketball Teams (junior varsity and varsity). It was the first home game of the 2021-22 season for the Camas teams. Student attendance was minimal at the junior varsity game but for the varsity game approximately 100 CHS students were in attendance. According to the students interviewed, the CHS student section was "really into the game, very supportive, boisterous, and rowdy" at times. Whenever the CHS students got "too much into the game" the cheerleaders would do a cheer to focus the students appropriately. The cheerleaders did not perform at the junior varsity game. During the varsity game the CHS Athletic Director watched the second half of the game from the corner of the gymnasium next to the student section against the railing and the cheerleader advisor sat in the front row, in front of the cheerleaders, towards the stairs the entire game. Shortly into the third quarter, the BHS coach, during a time-out, walked across the court toward the CHS student section saying, "we are not going to take this anymore." He was intercepted by the referees, and he told them he was hearing from his players that they were "hearing blatant racist language" directed at them from the CHS student section. The referees talked with the Athletic Director about the Benson coach's concerns, as did the Benson assistant coach. The CHS Athletic Director asked the students in the front rows if they had heard any inappropriate language or racial slurs, and he reminded the entire student section to "not say anything personal about the opposing team or its players and to only cheer for their own team."

Following the game, the BHS Coach wrote a letter to the Camas Interim Superintendent, Camas School Board Members, CHS Principal, CHS Athletic Director, broader Camas parent and student CHS community, OSAA and WIAA. In his letter (see attached) he outlined his concerns regarding the CHS student section using racial slurs directed at his team and players. He stated, "Based on my team's experience in your gym Friday night, clearly you have a lot more work to do around fundamental principles of diversity, equity and inclusion. My team is solely comprised of young women of color; they deserve to be treated with respect and feel safe no matter what gym they play in. The core of this complaint is a question: *What are you going to do to ensure that Camas High School will be a safe environment for the next team of non-white students that plays in your gym? I leave this question for all of you to grapple with and I trust that you will do so.*

Findings:

To arrive at these findings, I interviewed each of the persons listed above and reviewed two separate videos of the girls' varsity basketball game between Camas High School and Benson High School on December 10, 2021. Many adults interviewed are easily identifiable, students will remain anonymous. The students interviewed represent all high school grade levels, and were dispersed throughout the student section.

1. Everyone associated with CHS, who was in attendance for the junior varsity and/or the varsity games, did not recall hearing any racial slurs or seeing inappropriate gestures from the CHS student section directed at the Benson High School teams or individual players.
2. Each of three officials interviewed stated they had not heard any racial slurs or inappropriate gestures from the CHS student section directed at the team or individual players. They further stated the crowd, especially the students, were loud and into the game. They noted there was an issue during the game that involved the Benson coach challenging the recording of fouls.
3. CHS personnel in attendance at the junior varsity and/or varsity games, located in positions where they would likely hear any racial slurs or inappropriate language or gestures coming from the student section, stated they did not hear or see anything inappropriate. Both indicated that if they had heard or seen anything of this nature, they would have talked with the student(s) immediately and taken any additional appropriate action as needed.
4. When asked how they would describe the CHS students during the game, many students responded as follows: "really into the game, loud, energetic, supportive, enthusiastic, rowdy" but nothing different than usual when cheering on the Papermakers.
5. When CHS students were asked if there was anything about the game that seemed somewhat unusual from previous games they had attended, several commented on the BHS players kneeling for the National Anthem and/or being surprised when the Benson varsity coach crossed the court towards the student section but was intercepted by the referees. They acknowledged hearing the Benson coach shout something at the student section as he crossed the court, but no one could recall what he said given the loud environment of the gymnasium.
6. CHS parents/supporters interviewed stated they did not hear any racial slurs or inappropriate gestures coming from the student section.
7. Several CHS students commented a person they assumed was a Benson parent, walked in front of the student section 2-3 times, but they did not recall him saying anything to the students.

8. An article in the January 5, 2022, issue of the student news publication the *Camasonian* cited a CHS student who stated he/she had observed the racist remarks directed towards the players: "A girl on the Benson basketball team fell on the court. While she was getting back up a group of boys said to each other, 'Black Lives Matter: we stand with you' in a mocking tone with their fists in the air. Then they started laughing. The student said the Camas students appeared to not think the players nor the coaches could hear them. They tried to just say it to each other ... the boys around that did not hear it just laughed at the so-called joke." This incident was not cited in any of the interviews with other students seated in the CHS student section. I do not know the identity of the student quoted in the school newspaper. The student chose not to be interviewed and *Camasonian* student journalists protected their source.
9. The Benson coach stated in his letter that, "Throughout the game, both during play and timeouts, a number of my players told me one-on-one that they were hearing individuals from the student section using the N-word to taunt our players." My interview with the coach identified three Benson players who told him they had heard the N-word; however, when and where the comments were heard differed. The coach indicated that two players had heard derogatory comments while sitting in the stands during the JV game. They moved to another area in the gymnasium. During the game a third player reported hearing the N-word which led to the coach crossing the court and approaching the Camas student section.

An interview with two of the BHS players who reported to the coach hearing derogatory comments said they heard such comments when the team walked in front of the Camas student section when they entered the gymnasium following warm-up exercises in the cafeteria/commons. The players said they heard the N-word coming from the front/center area of the CHS student section. They told the coach what they heard and he told them "don't let them get to you." They said the first half of the game they heard a lot of "trash talk" coming from the student section, but in the second half they heard the N-word coming again from the student section. They said that it again seemed to be coming front/center and that it was a male voice. They believe it came from the same person. They stated these were the only times they heard the N-word. Following this incident, the BHS coach crossed the court toward the CHS student section.

At the conclusion of the interview, the Benson coach was asked if he would be willing to work with the leadership of CHS in addressing issues related to diversity, equity, and inclusion. He stated he would "be open" to considering such if asked.

9. The Washington Interscholastic Activities Association (WIAA) Executive Director shared the organization is very concerned about any accusations of racial slurring and/or inappropriate behavior from students or adults at any athletic or activities events in the state. Currently the Association does not have a specific rule on its website regarding incidents such as the one concerning the CHS/Benson girls' basketball games. The Association is launching a bias reporting tool on its website and is developing language for its handbook to address such incidents. The Executive Director noted the Camas School District had handled this complaint "just right" by reaching out to the Benson principal and coach, conducting an internal investigation, and engaging an external investigation.

Conclusion:

Based on nearly 50 face-to face interviews, including two BHS players, conducted in person, via Zoom, or via telephone there is clearly a difference of opinion as to whether inappropriate language, including racial slurs and/or the use of the N-word, by CHS students occurred during the junior varsity and/or varsity girls' basketball games between Camas High School and Benson High School on December 10, 2021. It is not possible to reach a definitive conclusion that racial slurs and/or inappropriate gestures were directed towards the BHS girls' basketball team or individual players from CHS students seated in the student section of the gymnasium. I did not observe any such conduct in the videos I reviewed. However, the specificity of the allegations by Coach Knox, and his allegations were generally corroborated by the interviews of the BHS players even though the details were somewhat different. The allegations of Coach Knox were also generally corroborated by the student interviewed for the school newspaper article. Therefore, I have concluded that some sort of inappropriate language likely was used by the CHS students, though no students could be specifically identified.

Suggestions:

1. The Camas High School Code of Conduct mentions "slurs" but needs to add language that directly addresses racial slurs, inappropriate gestures, and hurtful designations.
2. Due to the coronavirus, it was not possible to hold an all-school assembly or other large gathering of CHS students prior to the basketball season to discuss sportsmanship and appropriate language/gestures at sporting events either home or away. It is suggested this be an assembly topic, or be included in an assembly for another purpose, prior to the major sport seasons of the year.
3. Prior to the beginning of each athletic contest, it is suggested the PA announcer remind those in attendance, especially the student section(s) of the behavior that is expected and the behavior that will not be tolerated.
4. Several students alluded to occasionally hearing racial slurs/comments among students around the campus of CHS. It is, therefore, suggested the administration and faculty continue their efforts focused on diversity, equity, and inclusion following a comprehensive plan developed with those who have the required knowledge and experience, including a strong student voice.
5. It is suggested the Camas School District and/or CHS consider reaching out to Coach Knox to determine his interest in working together on issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion. A partnership, of sorts, with BHS, Coach Knox, and Benson players might prove beneficial to everyone.
6. Collaboration with WIAA and the regional athletic league(s) on game procedures for student behavior expectations and crowd control is strongly encouraged.

Note of Appreciation:

Appreciation to the numerous students from both Camas High School and Benson High School for their cooperation, forthrightness, and politeness.

Thanks to the BHS coach for his cooperation and forthright conversations with me.

Thanks to the CHS personnel and Camas School District personnel for their cooperation, support, and prompt attention for attending to my many, many requests.



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Dear Camas District Superintendent (Doug Hood), Camas School Board Members (Corey McEnry, Erika Cox, Connie Hennessey, Doug Quinn and Tracey Malone), Camas High School Principal (Tom Morris), Athletic Director (Rory Oster), broader Camas parent and student HS community, OSAA and **WIAA:**

My name is Eric Knox. I am the Benson High School head girls basketball coach of some of the most brilliant, gifted, talented and inspirational Black and brown young ladies in the city of Portland and the Portland Public School District. I could write in perpetuity how truly amazing these young ladies are and what they not only mean to so many in our city, but to their community as well. These young ladies stand on the broad shoulders of hard-working parents, aunties and uncles, grandparents and great grandparents, who generations ago endured the worst of bigotry, racism and oppression. They, like many of their Black and brown peers, are truly their ancestors' wildest dreams. Therefore, it is with great pain and frustration that I write this letter to the Camas SD, Camas high school principal, faculty, athletic director, coaches and student body.

This past Friday night, December 10th, 2021, Benson girl's basketball team played Camas High School at Camas. This was our girls' second game of the season and first road trip. They were naturally excited to play a very competitive game against a legendary program in SW Washington. Clearly Camas was as excited as we were based on the crowd's size and energy over the first home game of their season. During the JV game my varsity players, who sat next to the Camas student section, expressed to me that the student section had hurled racist slurs to and about my Benson players, specifically the "N-word." I took their words in and encouraged them to ignore them and allow our play to be the response to their racism. I assured them that I had their back and that unfortunately racism is a fact and reality for us, and that they will have to navigate this the rest of their lives.

Throughout the game, both during play and timeouts, a number of my players told me one-on-one that they were hearing individuals from the student section using the N-word to taunt our players. Additionally, Benson parents came to me and said that they heard people in the Camas student section using very derogatory language about our players and felt it created a very hostile environment. By the second half, I had heard the same thing from enough players that I finally had to take action, so I walked right on to the court at the next dead ball toward the student section saying "we are not going to do this anymore." The referees intercepted me and I alerted them to what I had been hearing from my players and that I would not tolerate the blatant racist language directed toward our girls, and if the referees did not get it under control we would not finish the game. The referees assured me that they would not tolerate that kind of behavior either. I then

huddled with my girls, and we agreed to play through the hostility. We won the game by eight points. The Camas players were great; none of my players or parents heard or felt anything hostile or racial from them; it appeared to be limited to the student section in the stands.

Please consider this an official complaint. I am writing to you as a Black father, husband, public school coach, community and nonprofit leader. I am as familiar as you are with athletic codes of conduct at state and national levels, as well as pertinent laws and regulations, and our political climate. I would never purport to educate you or make assumptions about your implementation of these things. Based on my team's experience in your gym Friday night, clearly you have a lot more work to do around fundamental principles of diversity, equity and inclusion. My team is solely comprised of young women of color; they deserve to be treated with respect and feel safe no matter what gym they play in. The core of this complaint is a question: What are you going to do to ensure that Camas High School will be a safe environment for the next team of non-white students that plays in your gym? I leave this question for all of you to grapple with and I trust that you will do so.

Sincerely,

Eric Knox
Benson Girls Basketball
Founder & Executive Director

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'EK', written over a horizontal line.

818-625-4887

