



Jayven Williamson "THINGS HAVE CHANGED"

Senior Jayven Williamson has been going to Minnehaha for seven years and has seen immense growth in relation to diversity and racial justice.

When Williamson first came to Minnehaha he was one of a few people of color in his grade. However, as time has progressed the diversity of our school has increased immensely.

"Things have changed," Williamson said. "It seems that every year I see more similar faces."

However, despite the increase in Minnehaha's diversity in the halls, Williamson has noticed a lack of diversity in his honors and AP classes. This achievement gap is not only at Minnehaha. According to a 2014 report from the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, while 37 percent of high-school students are Black or Latino, only 27 percent of students in AP classes are BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and

people of color). "I was talking to a teacher earlier in the year, and he told me that his AP class every year is always 99% white," Williamson said. He hopes that more people of color will join advanced courses, affecting change through equity in the classroom.

Jaylen Wells "I WOULD JUST LIKE IF PEOPLE WOULD THINK BEFORE THEY SAY SOMETHING"

In middle school, once she came to Minnehaha, junior Jaylen Wells would encounter her peers' ignorance when she was asked, "Are you African?" or "Do you speak African?" rather than "Where are you from?" Although kids were making an effort to get to know Wells, the questions they were asking were not the right ones.

"I would just like if people would think before they say something because you don't know how it could affect other people," said Wells.

This year, despite people's active voices on social media regarding race, and the recurring conversations about racism in America, Wells has encountered a number of racially insensitive statements made by her classmates. For example, a classmate would refer to people of color as "the Blacks" or make an effort to validate stereotypes giving excuses when called out for making racist remarks.

Last year a student asked Wells if her hair was real. Surprised by their comment Wells asked if they would have asked her that if she was white. They responded with, "Well, most Black girls have short hair. I just assumed yours was fake." The fact that the insensitivity might have been unintentional did not reduce its effect.



Paulita Todhunter

Minnehaha Academy's director of diversity initiatives, Paulita Todhunter, works daily to help bring racial equity to our school. Through running affinity groups, teaching in classes, working with teachers, talking with students and meeting with parents,

Todhunter assists the Minnehaha community in making steps towards racial competence through teaching and dynamic conversation.

This year, the offices of faith formation and diversity equity began to work together, placing the diversity initiative under the umbrella of faith formation. "It should be front and center just as our faith walk should be," said Todhunter, referring to the pursuit of racial equity.

Another new thing Minnehaha has implemented is the expectation that each teacher come up with a professional development statement about racial reconciliation. These statements will be implemented in the classrooms second semester. Advancements toward racial justice follow in the footsteps of being distinctively Christian, one of Minnehaha's core values.



WHAT'S IT LIKE TO BE Black



Mayah Ruiters "SHE WAS JUST PUTTING ME IN A CATEGORY"

Sitting in the gym, sophomore Mayah Ruiters looked down at her PSAT packet and was met with the request, "Please select your race." Confused, since she is more than one race, Ruiters raised her hand. A test proctor came up to her, and Ruiters asked if she could fill in two boxes on the form. Then the proctor suggested putting down whichever race she was more of. Now even more confused, Ruiters asked the proctor to explain. The proctor responded by saying to just put down that Ruiters was white.

The form allowed students to check more than one box, however, neither Ruiters nor the proctor noticed. The haste to get everyone going most likely contributed to the problem. While in a rush, people may be more likely to become less attentive to important issues causing hurt and confusion, despite their best intentions

"She was just putting me in a category, because that's what would be better or just say white it's fine. It was terrible," Ruiters said.

While that test proctor may not have had ill intentions, her words had an impact on Ruiters. Experiences like these are known as microaggressions, which social scientists define as "brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative attitudes toward stigmatized or culturally marginalized groups." However, through education and productive conversation, implicit bias can be overcome.

LIKE TO BE at MA?

Racial justice was the #1 issue of importance to M.A. students when asked before this year's election. In the decade since 2010, Minnehaha's diversity has increased from one-tenth to one-third students of color. In interviews, individuals each said they felt the school's racially inclusive atmosphere, but everyone had a story to tell about still encountering racially insensitive comments.

Dr. Donna Harris

Since 2009 when President Dr. Donna Harris came to Minnehaha, she has seen many advancements and changes made towards the reconciliation of race. However, just like most things in life, there are always places for growth.

"I know in the community there are always opportunities to build bridges and build relationships around race," said Harris.

As a Christian school, there is a greater emphasis and expectation to reflect the kingdom of God. With this we must learn and listen to each other's stories.

"Clearly, we see distinctions in color. So let's learn more and find out more," Harris said.

While Minnehaha has a ways to go as it regards race, each day our school comes closer to reflecting the diversity and unity of the kingdom of God.



Tuviah Elder

"THEY'RE NOT OPEN TO HEARING IT, BECAUSE A LOT OF THEM DON'T REALLY CARE."

At school, through chapel and different classes, discussions regarding race and the issues surrounding both the past and present of America are prevalent. Classroom conversations, however, have not been sufficient to prevent students of color from encountering ignorance.

"You can't really teach if the students aren't willing to hear," said senior Tuviah Elder. While teachers do make an effort to address the issue of race in America, it can only be received if students are willing to listen and learn.

"They're not open to hearing it, because a lot of them don't really care," Elder said. The mindset of indifference is extremely harmful as it creates a complacency towards racial prejudice.

