

UNDER THE RUG

As district administrators begin to adapt disciplinary policy, they must consider how racist incidents are categorized and tracked

FOR: 13 AGAINST: 0

The members of the editorial board who agree with the viewpoint of the editorial are represented by for, and those who disagree with the viewpoint are represented by against.

WHEN A BLACK girl was called a slur by a white student at school in November, our staff asked administration how often racist incidents are occurring at East. But administrators had an answer — there weren't any statistics.

Heck, us students didn't even know what repercussions are given to those who use racial slurs.

Four months later and administration still doesn't have the answers. Thanks to the currently-vague SMSD disciplinary policies relating to racism to "significant disrespect," kids could be saying racial slurs in the halls 100 times a day without the data on record or clear consequences.

District administrators are currently discussing much-needed potential changes to the discipline matrix that classifies actions and punishments, and they must consider how racist incidents are categorized and tracked.

Tracking incidents will allow educators to pinpoint exactly what students still need to learn about other cultures, whether it's the meaning of slurs, symbols, microaggressions or more.

It's easy to ignore the problem when we don't even know how bad it is.

The conversation about the SMSD disciplinary matrix began in November after the attack, a walkout and multiple student-run protests, and policy change is finally in the works. But we can't forget about the issue — it's time to keep holding the district accountable.

Currently, when a student uses a racial slur, gesture or symbol like a swastika on a bathroom stall, administrators code the incident as a Level 3.12 offense on the

standard district disciplinary matrix labeled, "Significant disrespect, use of obscene or profane language (verbal or written) or gestures" — the same category that cussing or giving someone the bird is counted towards.

Dropping the F-bomb is completely different than saying a slur tied to a deep history of oppression against minorities including slavery, Latino lynchings, Operation Wetback, the Chinese Exclusion Act, Japanese internment camps and more.

It's like saying that tripping someone is equivalent to lighting them on fire and pushing them off a bridge. Let's call it Level 3.12!

Apart from being morally questionable, the way that racism is treated by administrators also results in a blatant problem with tracking. There's only a record of the *total* number of 3.12 offenses — not of the ones specifically related to racism.

Other school districts nearby operate differently, like Topeka Public Schools with a discipline matrix that includes a category specifically for discriminatory and racial harassment.

Topeka schools have data about the instances of racism there that administrators can use to determine what cultural competency education for students needs to take place — SMSD should take notes.

SMSD administrators are currently having conversations with multicultural student groups and school administrators at the Center for Academic Achievement about what needs to change in the disciplinary matrix.

Racial harassment incidents need their own category. If we tracked these incidents, there would be raw data justifying more cultural education through presentations, assemblies and class projects curated to teach



exactly what students aren't understanding about cultural acceptance.

Or maybe, East is a perfect oasis free of racism and the November attack was an anomaly of character so we don't need cultural competency programs in place (but seeing as minority students have brought up the issue for years, we doubt this).

Right now, there's no way of telling. We need data.

Even reporting racist incidents would be easier with a designated category. Today, students and teachers alike don't know the consequence for any given racist act from slurs to ching-chongs — detention? suspension? expulsion? — so it's unclear

when to report what.

Telling a teacher that something racist happened feels like putting a message in a bottle and chucking it into the ocean. There's a chance that the message will reach administrator island, but then they'll drop it into the Level 3.12 offense treasure chest and we don't know what happens to the perpetrator.

We want to know that if we hear and report a slur, then the aggressor will receive X repercussion.

Yes, policy change is slow and can take months. But we're watching what the district does next. To us, it's simple — apples aren't bananas and racism isn't just "disrespect."

ACTIONS & CONSEQUENCES

See the difference between SMSD's disciplinary policies and Topeka Public School's policies regarding discriminatory incidents

LEVEL 3.12 OFFENSE - SMSD

“SIGNIFICANT DISRESPECT, use of obscene or profane language (verbal or written) or gestures

SCAN ME COMPARE



See the entire SMSD discipline matrix



See the entire Topeka Public School discipline policy

LEVEL 2 OFFENSE - TOPEKA PUBLIC SCHOOLS

“DISCRIMINATORY HARASSMENT: Unwelcome remarks or behavior based on a student's race, religion, disability, gender, sexual orientation, gender expression, gender identity or ethnic heritage that is severe, persistent or pervasive enough to create an intimidating or hostile learning environment