



“Challenging People to Shape
a Better Future Now”

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PPS Deserves Support on MLC

GUEST EDITORIAL

The recent uproar concerning PPS Superintendent Carole Smith, and issues at the K-12 school Metropolitan Learning Center, have once again brought race into the forefront of public discourse. As Socrates famously said, “the unexamined life is not worth living.” If we are to acknowledge issues surrounding race, then we must not be afraid to examine them. To state the issue clearly: race matters. It matters in this city, our state, and in this country. However, it is the why and how, the outcomes of the fact that it does matter, that this conversation must address. Fear of examination does not make the issue disappear.

There is a reason why Oregon State Statute requires culturally competent healthcare. There is a reason why Oregon State Statute allows a legislator to request a racial equity impact statement for certain legislation. There is a reason why the City of Portland requires an equity impact assessment during its budget process. There is a reason why Multnomah County has an Equity Lens Tool. Equity is about focusing on outcomes, not intentions. Equity is a critical thinking exercise. Equity

is about being willing to have difficult conversations because race matters.

Race matters, therefore culture matters, and race and culture impact outcomes. In this country, the dominant culture and voice is male, white, heterosexual, and able-bodied. This is not an indict-

expelled at significantly higher rates than their white counterparts for similar behaviors. Race matters. Culture matters. The discussion surrounding MLC is about race and culture. The history and culture of MLC were mentioned in previous Oregonian articles as important aspects to the school, and MLC was described as being founded on a philosophy and practice of “open-mindedness.” It “invited white and black students to enroll.” If that history is no longer the case, should it not be examined?

Equity is about being willing to have difficult conversations because race matters

ment, it is not a criticism. It is not calling everyone a racist, sexist, homophobe, or assuming everyone’s indifference as to the capabilities of people with disabilities. It is an observation based on examination.

Across the country and in Portland, children of color are disciplined, suspended and

Black and White parents said that race is an issue at the school. Some said that it is an issue, but not really a big issue. This statement implies a luxury of not being a parent worried about whether their child should wear an afro to school, of being a parent not worried about whether their child’s English is good enough to partici-

pate, or not being assumed to be a relative of your child’s principal of color just because you are the same race.

Race matters, and clearly is an issue at MLC. Superintendent Smith has shown the courage to say that it does matter, that it impacts our children, and it should be examined. We wholeheartedly concur.

Sharon Gary-Smith, justice activist and foundation director
Avel Gordly, retired Oregon State Senator
Gloria Gostnell, retired Portland Public Schools principal
Michael “Chappie” Grice, board member, National Council on Educating Black Children, and retired public educator
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Diversity: Google Boldly Did the Right Thing

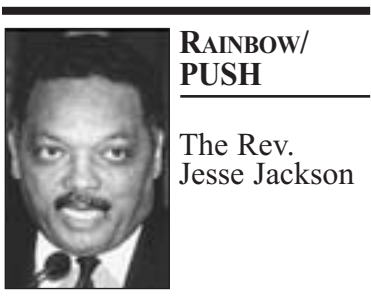
Last week, Google made the bold and necessary decision to release information about their employment diversity, detailing the race and gender makeup of its workforce, admitting in the words of Senior Vice President Laszlo Bock, “Google is not where we want to be when it comes to diversity and it’s hard to address these kinds of challenges if you’re not prepared to discuss them openly.”

It is time for other Silicon Valley companies to follow Google’s lead. According to Mike Swift of the San Jose Mercury, leading tech firms – Apple, Oracle, Yahoo and Applied Materials – waged an 18-month fight against a freedom of information request for their workforce data, lobbying the Labor Department to treat it as a trade secret.

But as Google’s figures – and those of Intel, which was the first to release its employment data – show, Silicon Valley has a big problem with equal opportunity. And, as Bock states, you can’t fix what you won’t admit. You can’t face the truth that you hide from.

And the problem is serious. Google reports that 83 percent of its tech workforce is male, as well as 79 percent of its leadership. Ninety-four percent of its tech workforce is White or Asian, with only 2 percent Hispanic and 1 percent Black. It starts at the top, where 95 percent of its leadership is White or Asian, with only 2 percent Black and 1 percent Hispanic.

This lack of diversity – the absence of equal opportunity for women and minorities – is a big deal. These are, after all, the companies that are creating the



**RAINBOW/
PUSH**

The Rev.
Jesse Jackson

inventions and the markets of the future. The area south of San Francisco Bay is growing about twice as fast as the rest of the country. Unemployment in the tech sector is down to 1-3 percent.

‘As Google’s figures – and those of Intel, which was the first to release its employment data – show, Silicon Valley has a big problem with equal opportunity’

The companies argue that this isn’t about discrimination but about merit. But this is much more a case of an old boys’ network. Referrals play a major role in hiring, and they come from networks dominated by White and Asian men. Pipelines are set up to draw from the old pool. Many of the Asians are from abroad, here on limited visas, allowing the companies to pay them less.

The companies argue that this starts in college, with a mere 12 percent of computer science undergraduate degrees as major universities going to women. But that is less a reflection of the absence of talent, than the absence of outreach. Instead of resisting reform, these companies should be

leading it. Startups with diverse staffs are more likely to be successful, according to Fast Company, a business magazine.. Minorities and women are major users of social media, and purchasers of technology products. Diverse companies are more likely to anticipate the needs and the desires of their customers.

Other companies should now join Google and Intel and publish data on their workforce diversity. This week, we will send the leading companies a letter requesting action, and we’ll report on which respond and which do

huge talent pool that can and must be tapped. Blacks and people of color represent money, market talent and location. Tech companies have resources, innovation and capital. There’s a basis for two way trade and a mutually beneficial, reciprocal relationship.

And the companies should aggressively open up from the top down. Their boards are not composed of all tech people; they should be diverse. Their IPOS can be managed by diverse firms, not just the old White boy crowd. Their suppliers should be diverse.

This month, Google will send representatives to the Rainbow Push national convention in Chicago to meet with presidents from historically Black colleges that teach computer science and engineering. Other companies should send representatives as well. Reaching out will inspire interest and help identify skilled future employees.

By 2040, America will be a majority minority country. Polls show that this scares many Americans, but it should inspire, not scare tech companies. The customers of the future will be increasingly diverse. Companies should act aggressively now to insure that their workforce reflects the customers they are trying to reach. Google has joined Intel to break open the door. Now it is time for others to join them in striding through to a new day.

Jesse L. Jackson, Sr. is founder and president of the Chicago-based Rainbow PUSH Coalition. You can keep up with his work at www.rainbowpush.org.