

Dear readers,

This is an open letter to the public to express how I feel about the treatment of staff and students at Beaufort Jasper Academy for Career Excellence.

I feel sorry for the staff and students that attend this school. No, I'm not a student that attends this school but I'm a student that wishes he did. Because of all the different classes they have to offer. I'm also jealous of Beaufort Jasper Academy for Career Excellence because it is taken all of one of my parent's time. At the dinner table that is all he talks about. Taking phone calls from other board members all time of the night. Beaufort Jasper Academy is taking all of my parent's time and energy. One of my parents is on this school and Beaufort County School board. I was there with my parent to attend one of the board meetings. I am frankly, appalled at my parent's and some of the board members. I also apologize for their action, unjust actions.

There is an Instructor that works for BJACE and has been there for years. I've known him for the 18 years of my life. The only thing he knows is auto collision and motorcycles. This instructor and his wife, who also sits on Beaufort County School Board, have been invited over my parents' home at least once a week. He is like an uncle to me. Last week, my parents and this instructor and his wife with other board members and their spouses including the superintendent, was having dinner at my parent's home and that's when I realized I was born in a family who are and always be prejudice. As I look back this is something they have always been.

They were discussing this instructor's week suspension for disrespecting his superior. He received a week suspension. He admits it and said, he did and told everyone at the dinner table what he said to him/her. There were a lot of laughter and words I dare not repeat. He tried to bring a lawsuit against the school and the director, but it was denied. He did an appeal and the only way for it to go through is to get the current director removed. They want to put a patsy in place. (Mr. Art Williams) so they can sue. This is their words, not mine. This is where our tax money is being spent. Don't let them do this.

These board members including one of my parent's are retaliating against him/her for suspending him. They stated, "No nigger is going to tell us what to do". I was in totally shocked. They plan on ousting the Director of this school and any other person's who wrote a statement on what happened that day. Which is four employees including a BCSD Resource Officer. The way I see it they wrote a statement of what happened that day. They have nothing to do with the actions of the Director and this instructor.

Don't get me started on what they say about JCSD and JCSD BJACE Board members. "INCOMPETENT MIXED MONKEY" stated Cordray. Hinton Orischak and Moss couldn't stop laughing. These are the people who are running our schools. Please people wake up. They even have the news reporter in their pocket. Don't you notice that nothing positive is printed in the Island Packet Newspaper but negative things? I know for a fact, positive things has happened over the years, why isn't it in the paper?

They have been planning on a way to remove this Director from this school for about a year now. I thought they want to remove this director, because she wasn't doing her job, but what I realize, after hearing all the conversations is that want to remove the director because of race. I don't think that is right. I'm white and so is my parent's and I don't want to be like them. If you hire some one to do a job, you can't fire them because of their skin color and they don't do what you say.

I've talked to a friend of mine, who is African American, about this situation. He advises to try to correct this issue or I will be like many other people, by denying and secretly hiding my prejudices. I also asked him "How is it being African American in the 21st century"? He read this to me.

It's interesting, this word 'African'. The images and representations that pop up in one's mind when one hears it. Reads it. Or thinks about it. I know what I think when I think about being African, but I've always wondered if others shared the same ideas. It's funny, when you meet people in the street and you ask them what they think about being African, everybody has a different idea. For some being African means being black; or coming from a country on the African continent; or having particular opinions on culture, ethnicity and tradition; and/or having a heightened sense of family and community. To others being African means having a shared history of oppression and domination; being marginalized; and/or being inferior to a so-called developed other, who is more often than not lighter-skinned. To others yet again being African conjures images of Safaris, wild animals, colorfully printed outfits, music, sunsets and so on and so forth. While some celebrate this idea of being African, others shy away from it, almost with shame. Others see it merely as a political and ideological agenda carved out over the centuries by a wide range of individuals in order to satisfy one or other politico-economic interest.

Coming back to this idea of equating being African to being black, Chinua Achebe, for example, speaks of himself thus: "I'm an Ibo writer, because this is my basic culture; Nigerian, African and a writer...no, black first, then a writer. Each of these identities does call for a certain kind of commitment on my part. I must see what it is to be black – and this means being sufficiently intelligent to know how the world is moving and how the black people fare in the world. This is what it means to be black. Or an African – the same: what does Africa mean to the world? When you see an African what does it mean to a white man?"^[1] Does Achebe mean that those North of the Equator, or the white people in Southern Africa or even the mixed races across the continent are not African? What about Afro-Americans or the *Antillais*? These and many other questions come back constantly in research and debates on African identity.

There is this common saying about how one needs to know where one comes from in order to know where one is going. I wonder how most people interpret this, whether they think about the country they come from or maybe their ethnic *appartenance* or even about their immediate family background. I doubt many people would think about the continent they're from. It seems difficult to understand why anyone would expect one to

think of this wide geographical expanse; with so much cultural, linguistic, economic, social, political and religious variety; as the *one and only* place that an individual comes from, and should identify with. It seems like such a waste, almost an insult to this rich tapestry, to subsume these myriad realities into one dense idea, which, rather unsurprisingly, no one seems to have pinpointed exactly. Perhaps we are all just African because we are expected to identify and commit to certain modes of life and/or assumptions that have stood the test of time. Until we start questioning these assumptions in our everyday lives, they will keep following us for generations to come, and this I assure you, is not to anyone's advantage.

To me, being African means so many things. It means originating from a continent rich with a variance in culture, music, food, sense of being and the list goes on. It means sometimes feeling certain awkwardness from being treated differently because of a set of assumptions, stereotypes and value judgments. It means sometimes having to defend an entire continent full of people with whom I do not necessarily identify. More than anything else, it means realizing that social constructions influence our lives deeply though we recognize them as constructs. We may be products of society, but I believe we also make the society we are products of. To all Africans trying to position themselves as part of this complex entity, it would be easier to simply be. Be African, be proud, but most importantly be unique.

As quoted by K.A. Appiah "In my Father's House. Africa in the Philosophy of Culture" (1992)

After seeing and hearing what one of my parent's and other board members are doing. I'm on a little crusade. I went to HHIMS. I talked with some of the BJACE students that get off the bus there. One student stated "

" I chose this school because I'm not a college bound student. I want to learn a skill and there no other school in this district that offer so many choices. But lately it's been so hard to concentrate because of all the issues that going on here".

"Guidance Counselors tells me that I'm not a good fit for that school. They try to confuse me. They won't tell us any information for next school year".

"If I can't attend BJACE I will quit school, I have no other option, we have so many classes to chose from in one school"

"HHIHS is a drug dealing school, why would the board want us to attend there. At BJACE is smaller by number and we get the attention we need".

I have countless statements from students. I realized how wrong BCSD board members are. At the beginning of the year they was trying to find a legal way to pull out of BJACE. They found out there is no legal way to do this. So now they are trying to take over the school and put some white in charge of the school and who will listen to what

they say, so they can spend BJACE funding as they please.

If you think about, I they're pulling out from BJACE, why are they concerned about the daily run of this school? They article in the newspaper stated that the Director was on leave until the board and the director establish a relationship? What? If this is a predominantly a minority school, why is all but one board members are white? Isn't there a law against this?

I can go on and on of the conversations I been a witness to or heard, but this would be a book instead of a letter. I'm trying to correct a situation that is wrong and again I do apologize for the wrong doing of my family and their associates. Please don't wait until others lose their jobs, to make this situation right!!!

Parents, media, business owners, students and staff of BJACE and community of Beaufort and Jasper Counties stand up for what is right.

Thank you for reading.