

Case Study 2: “Making White People Nervous”

The fall semester is off and running. The school has hired several new teachers and administrators this summer. Many of the new hires are BIPOC, something the school recently committed to diversify the faculty and staff and represent the growing student population and neighborhood.

The HR Director approaches the head of school one morning and shares that his recent hires are making people “nervous.” The head doesn’t understand her insinuation and asks for more information. She shares that the new hires do not represent the school’s “typical profile” and there’s chatter among faculty and staff about all of the changes.

Later that day, a Black administrator who has been at the school for 15 years approaches the head and says she doesn’t know how to talk to any of the new hires and do her job anymore. The head again asks for additional explanation. The administrator says all of the Black faculty and staff were told by the previous head that there should be no more than three or four people of color meeting at any one time. Meetings were also always held with the door open, because otherwise it made “white people nervous.”

The head is shocked and surprised and doesn’t know what to say. He also wonders about his own future at the school, the school’s commitment to DEI as they have stated so publicly to everyone in the last six months.

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- Given your current role, consider your response or action.
 - Are there gaps between the school’s espoused values, group norms, and shared values?
 - At which points in the story could a different approach have averted the predictable outcome?