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Campo Parents Club on Diversity & Inclusion helmed by one of Moraga's newest residents

By Vera Kochan



Ellide Smith Photo provided

Hoping to replicate Oregon's physical dynamics, but with a touch more sunshine, Ellide Smith and her family moved to Moraga six months ago, focusing on its educational reputation, hills and parks.

Little did Smith realize that in early May she would become chair of the Campo Parents Club on Diversity and Inclusion, an idea developed by approximately 25 parents during a fall Parents Club meeting. "Even coming from Oregon, where the black community is very small, I could feel how difficult it must be for the 0.65% of black students at Campolindo," Smith stated. "I also felt it was a good opportunity to meet people in my new community while doing something that was good and impactful for parents and students."

The need for a diversity and inclusion club arose due to issues both on and off campus. Victimized families felt concerns over the handling of those situations especially within the communities of color. "There is proven research that shows that if students do not feel included or that they belong or have the effects of tons of micro-aggressions filling up their head space, they don't do well in school," Smith said. "The Campo academic testing data supports this."

Smith says she and her children, ages 6, 8 and 15, have not experienced any forms of racism in the community or the schools. "I have two elementary school-aged children, and they have not spoken to me of any issues, and I try to ask them in a roundabout way, as to protect their innocent views on life." Although, classmates have wanted to touch and feel their hair "because it's so different." Smith has noticed the effects of a lack of instruction regarding their black culture and wishes it went beyond learning about Martin Luther King Jr. and Frederick Douglass during Black History Month. "My

oldest, a rising sophomore at Campo, hasn't experienced racism either that I know of, but his transition to Campo has been rocky and not as inviting as his former high school in Oregon," she added. "He struggled with feeling the sense of belonging and inclusion, especially on the lacrosse team. His words were, 'Everyone knows each other. No one knows me. I'm just trying to survive.'"

Smith heads a core committee of six people at CPCDI with an ever-increasing group of 150 and counting, which includes parents, former students, faculty, district and community members seeking to provide a safe and comprehensive educational experience. While current students are not part of the committee, they will reap the benefits of its existence.

CPCDI's vision is to "work towards an inclusive academic, athletic and social environment where every member of our community is valued and feels an equal sense of belonging." Response from the community both before and after recent events has been largely positive including support from teachers of all four Acalanes Union High School District campuses.

Encouraged by the affirmative steps toward change, Smith stated, "To see a predominantly white community say 'we could/should do better' for the black community and other communities of color is something that most don't expect. Of course, there are those that are saying this talk of diversity and inclusion is just a fad and will pass. That there's nothing wrong in our area and racism doesn't exist. That racial slurs, epithets, complicit biases and stereotypes are just 'kids being kids' or 'teenagers making mistakes,' but we have seen publicly, on a local and national scale, the harmful and dangerous effects of that sort of rhetoric and thinking."

Smith, who works for an event management firm, developed the CPCDI website (www.DNICampo.com) in her spare time. Although she states that it's still a work-in-progress, it is already full of resource information while on the way to listing additional content related to racial, LGBTQ+ and mental health issues.

There are many things that Smith would like to accomplish while serving as the chair of the committee "I want to see Campolindo and the AUHSD take immediate measurable action steps that addresses why only 57% of white students and 47% of students of color feel accepted at Campolindo, or why 52% of white students and 40% of students of color feel proud belonging to Campolindo." The D&I parents group feels there should be a full-time director to track any progress data.

Smith would also like to see an updated curriculum to include the history of people of color; a clarification of disciplinary actions that addresses racial language, symbols, religious bigotry and discrimination; and a Student Code of Conduct. Most importantly, she hopes for more active parental participation during D&I events.

Smith stresses that all students need to be responsible for their consequences. "Students should not be ostracized or lose their `social equity' because they are calling out inappropriate and unjust behavior. I want all of the students to feel the positive effects of a fully inclusive culture." Smith concluded, "We can no longer sit back and assume that all is fine because the majority is fine. We need to keep evolving and self-correcting until all are fine."

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