
BAMN's Involvement with Ferndale Schools – Answers to Frequently Asked Questions

What is happening with BAMN in Ferndale?

In Fall 2008, people requesting signatures on petitions began appearing at Ferndale events and at University High School. It was determined the petitioners represent BAMN, a nationally known civil rights group, and are alleging the Ferndale Schools have set up a separate, but unequal education system by creating University High School as a regional high school, and continuing to operate Ferndale High School as a district high school. BAMN representatives hosted a press conference at the Ferndale Public Library on October 9, 2008 attended by two reporters, representatives from BAMN and several Ferndale Schools staff. The following week, three BAMN members met with the Ferndale Schools administration to clarify the inaccuracies in their literature that claim blatant and untrue discrepancies between the educational programs offered at UHS and FHS. The group also attended the October 20, 2008 Ferndale Board of Education meeting to announce publically their demand that the Ferndale Schools immediately change the enrollment policies at Ferndale High School to allow Detroit residents to enroll, and join BAMN in the first step of creating a regional public education system.

Who is BAMN, and what do they want?

BAMN is a Detroit-based organization whose full name is: Coalition to Defend Affirmative Action, Integration & Immigrant Rights and Fight for Equality By Any Means Necessary (BAMN). BAMN's focus is on building a new civil rights movement to defend affirmative action, integration, and civil rights and to advance the struggle for equality in American society by any means necessary. Under the leadership of BAMN attorneys Shanta Driver and George B. Washington, the Detroit chapter of the organization launched a campaign in Fall 2008 to “**End Discrimination Against Detroit Students in Ferndale and Other Area Schools.**” In their requests to the Ferndale School Board, BAMN has asked the district to 1) “end the practice of separate, but equal education (that they term “Jim Crow Segregation”) in Ferndale by allowing Detroit residents to attend Ferndale High School, not only University High School; 2) Provide UHS with equal supplies, and make them in every way the peer and equal to FHS; and 3) BAMN has informed the Ferndale Schools they plan to demand that the district join with them in beginning a process of regionalizing and integrating public education by opening enrollment at Ferndale High School to Detroit resident students. For more information on BAMN, visit their website at: <http://www.bamn.com/kingsdream/index.asp>.

How does BAMN's focus on the Ferndale Schools impact our school community?

The Ferndale Schools' administration and Board of Education are committed to ensuring the daily focus within our schools and classrooms is on continuing to provide a quality education for every child, every day. Superintendent Gary Meier says, “We're proud of what we've done to ensure every student receives an equitable, quality education in an environment that values diversity. We don't

intend to change our focus now, and we vehemently reject any claims that the district, through the establishment of University High School, is engaging in anything that could be called ‘separate, but unequal’ educational practices.”

BAMN has stated they intend to launch a protest to gain public awareness of their campaign to create one regional school district that includes Detroit and the suburbs. Because these inaccurate allegations accuse the Ferndale Schools of creating racially segregated schools, BAMN’s demand for a regional metropolitan school district could result in a lengthy focus on our district. Regardless of BAMN’s actions in the Ferndale community, the district is committed to continuing to promote the values of a diverse and inclusive school community just as we now serve all of our students.

What is Jim Crow Segregation?

BAMN alleges that the Ferndale Public Schools provide “a classic example of the Jim Crow system that the suburbs are creating on the basis of the Michigan "Schools of Choice Act," which gives school districts the right to pick and choose which of their schools they open to non-residents.” Between 1876 and 1965, Jim Crow Segregation laws were state and local laws that required segregation in public facilities, with “separate but equal” status for blacks.

The Ferndale Schools take the position that these allegations are false and offensive to the district’s mission which values and promotes diversity. The district is committed to ensuring the K-12 system provides equitable, quality education for all students. In addition, the BAMN allegations are incorrect regarding the enrollment goals of University High School. Ferndale created University High School with open enrollment through the opportunities available in the Schools of Choice (105c) program. Students from within the Ferndale School district, from Oakland, Wayne, Macomb, Livingston, and other contiguous counties may enroll at UHS. As a magnet school, UHS enrollment depends on many factors including parent and student choices to leave their neighborhood school, travel a great distance to attend high school, meet all new classmates, and participate in a new educational program. The majority of students who have chosen to enroll at University High School are African-American Detroit residents, who represent over 150 public, private, and charter middle schools.

What is the school district’s position/response to BAMN’s allegations?

University High School does indeed provide a different kind of public high school opportunity for our students. This school was created to reform and redesign public high school. However, it is important for all of us to make a distinction between a difference and a deficiency.

Our students have extra-ordinary experiences in a school where every adult involved in their education is focused on ensuring they succeed. University High School’s primary focus is on providing a rigorous, college-prep curriculum to any student in the metro area.

What about the problems BAMN sees in discrepancies between UHS and FHS?

There’s an important distinction to make here that different is not deficient. UHS teachers are very passionate and skilled at creating a school climate that is nurturing, welcoming, and designed for every student’s success. High achievement and ultimately, college success, is the primary goal at University High School.

How and when does the Board of Education make decisions about Schools of Choice?

Annually, in February and March, the Superintendent assesses district resident enrollment and enrollment projections to determine whether there will be the capacity to permit participation in the state's Schools of Choice program to offer limited openings to new students (in Grades K-9). Additionally, the Superintendent assesses the enrollment capacity for University High School and recommends limited openings through the Schools of Choice program. Based on the Superintendent's assessment and recommendation, the Board of Education considers and acts on the Superintendent's recommendation no later than the April Board meeting regarding Schools of Choice participation.

In recent years, a range of 50-80 Schools of Choice students have been admitted annually to grades K-9, with approximately 145 new students admitted to University High School (grades 9-10). Historically, the K-9 enrollment of Schools of Choice students has been through the Schools of Choice 105 program (Oakland County residents), while the University High School enrollment has been through the 105 and 105C program (Oakland County and residents of contiguous counties). All Schools of Choice recommendations are determined annually based on enrollment projections and space availability.

Participation in the Schools of Choice enrollment program allows the district to maximize enrollment and minimize overhead costs. Approximately 10% of the district's student body are enrolled through the Schools of Choice program and are residents of area communities in Oakland County. New Schools of Choice students are only accepted in Grade 9 at Ferndale High School.