



February 18, 2014

Kevin Skelly, Superintendent
Palo Alto Unified School District
25 Churchill Ave.
Palo Alto, CA 94306

Re: Public Records Act Request (Interview Transcripts)

Dear Kevin:

This letter constitutes our request under the California Public Records Act for copies of the transcripts of interviews with "students of color" conducted by Diana Wilmot last year, as referenced in your "Weekly" last Friday.

Please redact any identifiable personal information of the students interviewed.

Since these transcripts were recently shared with principals, presumably with identifying information removed, I assume they can be provided immediately in response to this request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Bill Johnson', written over a light grey rectangular background.

William S. Johnson
Publisher

One of our primary goals is prepare students for college/career and life after school. How well did the district prepare you?

I've talked to other people from other districts, and I think we are more prepared. More developed high school than others. I am better prepared for college than kids ahead of me. Palo alto did a good job getting people ready for college.

Isn't that hard. Paly prepared them a lot for school.

In college, I go to [redacted]. I am more advanced than other students in my classes.

I go to [redacted] and I'm not being challenged enough, when I thought I would be overwhelmed. I struggled a lot in high school and didn't have AP classes. I'm in more advanced classes than my peers in college and doing well.

I felt the teachers didn't give a damn about me. They didn't put college in my face. If they pushed me to the limit and gave me the resources I would have known what to do. I feel ready to make the transition to [redacted]. I thank Paly, though. This is better than any other district in California. I've been here since Kindergarten, and I've had a better education than other kids.

How could have the district done a better job in preparing you for life after high school?

What you're doing right now, it's working.

I think they could have more programs like [redacted], which is supposed to help you get into college. I was in [redacted] in [redacted]. Helped me plan my high school career and be UC/CSU eligible. More programs like that for minority students and make students take the class seriously and take the class so they are ready for college.

I was in [redacted] since [redacted]. Helped me get more organized and get structure in how I study. We went to SJSU, Stanford, field trips to colleges, beneficial to students. Better experience for anyone who is struggling....more hands-on.

Majority of the class were minorities and we supported each other. In middle school I didn't think of college. I didn't get introduced to college until later freshman year. [redacted] checked your classes and made sure you were successful. Helped me the most. [redacted] is a mixture of structure and resources....sense of community. [redacted] felt like a family, because we were with each other most of the week. Free trip to SoCal to look at colleges. Lots of scholarship opportunities. Strict, but more of a family. Family

but we all have same goal to get into college. Everyone's there to help each other. They give you tutoring and help you afford college.

I should have taken more advantage of high school. They were hands-on and they wanted to help out. I didn't have a major experience, because I lagged on going to school. I can't really say anything bad about them. They helped out, especially senior year, to help me figure out what I want to do.

helped me, but I think it would be better if the were encouraged early on to help students realize this as a possibility. People were surprised when I got into college. They underestimated me, and they should have put the word out about college earlier.

Introduce college to people earlier and help them figure out to take the right courses. Too late the junior year to take the right courses in high school.

They need to introduce us to A-G requirements as well as high school graduation requirements. Many students don't know that there is a difference.

I found out about through a friend (flyers at lunch). IF you know someone that would be good for and would need the help, it was mostly word of mouth.

There would be talks at the lunch, but no one would pay attention. There needs to be a raising awareness about these resources.

It would be great if there were more in depth, one-on-one conversations about available resources to be more successful....that would be helpful.

People or experiences that positively shaped your high school experience?

There was a teacher that never gave up on me at Paly. She pushed me to graduate and helped me get back into school, talked to other teachers for me, had my back, and pushed me.

The knew about and really supported me and advised me on which classes to take. Also from , I got a lot of help. Other teachers underestimated my ability to go to a 4-year school. They told me it was okay to go to a 2-year school. They weren't as encouraging.

My teacher was always there for me. I have close relationships with a lot of teachers at Paly, but that close relationship with a teacher makes a big difference. My teacher had high expectations for me and she knew I wanted to become a and helped me set my own path so that I will get to .

I didn't have any of that. I was in [redacted] too, but that didn't click. I got more motivation from the older students, not from any of the teachers or counselors. I didn't really feel a connection in high school, or middle school or elementary.

Coaches in the high school made a big difference.

Teachers helped me out even when I got kicked out and helped me even though I kept wanting to give up. I didn't see a spark from a teacher until my senior year. Teachers should ask students "what's their motivation? What's your interest?"

People or experiences that negatively shaped your high school experience?

I got D's in some classes that I had to retake. That was my doing.

In the classes I didn't do well in, that was because of me. Even if I couldn't stand the teacher, that's not an excuse for failing. But there weren't that many negative experiences aside from an individual teacher I didn't like. That was the highest level of discomfort I felt, but it wasn't too bad.

My second semester of senior year in high school was the hardest time. Some teachers were there for me, who knew how hard I was working were continuing to motivate me and proud that I was accepted into a 4-year. Some teachers kept telling me that I wasn't going to make it, even though I kept asking for help during lunch and brunch, and wouldn't help me as much as I thought they would.

At times I felt that some of the faculty belittled me. This gave me inward motivation to prove them wrong. It can be negative, but it depends on how you take it.

For the teacher that I had negative communication with, when I asked for help, they didn't give it to me. At first they gave me the impression that they would be there for me, and then when it came down to it, they weren't there to help. They kept trying to push me to go to community college and I had already been accepted to a 4-year and made up my mind. I'm emailing, asking for appointments at lunch, and then when [redacted] met my parents [redacted] said that I was the one not working hard.

It was kind of the opposite for me. They thought that I should have gone to a four year. I was planning to go to [redacted] and then I decided to go to [redacted]. They were disappointed that I chose to go to [redacted] and then transfer to the [redacted]. They were disappointed that I didn't choose to go to a 4-year.

One of the goals is to increase the number of students meeting A-G courses. What are the obstacles in getting access?

For me, Every teacher has a different style. It was difficult to be in many classes with so many teaching styles. I had to retake a few classes. Second semester senior year was really hard, and I ended up with two D's. These two D's were with [redacted]

teachers that knew how hard I was working. Those teachers wrote letters of recommendations for me to continue to go to the 4-year class. I had the class and they continued to motivate me. But not all students get counseled about the A-G requirements. They should talk more about A-G over the high school requirements. They supported me, but they told me, "You are one of the first students at Palo Alto High School to go to a four-year." More students should get this chance.

I think the only place I realized that I would need to meet A-G was in advisory. In advisory there isn't enough time. I think there needs to be more one-on-one sessions. If it wasn't for advisory, I wouldn't know what A-G was.

Same for me. A-G requirements were introduced to me through advisory. If I didn't have advisory, I wouldn't have known about A-G. I never found out through other teachers. I didn't have counseling until junior year. If I had waited to hear from my counselor, it would have been too late.

What are the obstacles or challenges exist for students in completing A-G courses with a C or better?

For me it was knowing that no one in my family has....they either dropped out of high school or went to community college and they just didn't graduate. So, I felt it was just okay for me to go high school or go to community college. I felt that that was fine and I think it just is fine, because it depends on what they actually want to do. But I didn't really think about it. I had dreams about what I wanted to do when I was older, but I didn't think it could be a reality until I was in high school. My

So I felt like high school was just my main priority.

Is there anything that the school could have done to put college on your mind earlier?

I didn't think about college until I was in high school. I do think college should be introduced in middle school. A lot of programs start right at freshman year. When I got into high school, they actually asked for my 8th grade grades. They should be talking about it in 8th grade, especially to minority students. Like most of my friends were first generation, first in their families to go to college. They just should think about making a difference in their family and for their kids.

My parents didn't go to college. Going to school in Palo Alto, everyone expects you to go to college....you pretty much have to go to college....like that's how I felt....it's second nature.

I feel that in Palo Alto it's already expected for the students to apply to college and do the A-G requirements. But coming from a community college and going to school in Palo

Alto, it was kind of different for me. But that's why I came to school in Palo Alto, because my dad saw that and he wanted me to make the change.

It's not necessarily the school's responsibility. When I talked to other students from Palo Alto and said that I was going to [redacted], they never really saw [redacted] as an option when they were raised in Palo Alto. But when I talked to minority students, they didn't have that. (they seemed okay with it). Maybe you can get the parents involved.

I also [redacted] and my parents put me here because they knew that the schools here were better than the schools in [redacted] and that we would have a better chance. My parents were always really strict and expected us to go to college. Other people's parents didn't push college as much as my parents did. They can spend more time investing in their kids to get to college.

As a Latino or African-American student in a school that is high achieving and primarily White/Asian, do you feel that you experiences any additional obstacles to academic success....as a function of being Latino or African American?

It's a welcoming environment. You feel like a fish out of water. But everyone is super nice and no one puts it in your face.

I always felt I was behind everyone else....that I had to work a lot harder to keep up with everyone else. Even since kindergarten. Through all of elementary school, I had to take special classes to learn how to speak English, and in middle school I still felt behind and in high school I still felt behind. In high school, I really had to work hard to become a competitive student and to have any chance to go to college...to have a competitive application. But I always had the feeling I was behind everyone else.

I also had to do programs throughout elementary and middle school. I was in reading classes, English classes. I also had to take Saturday school just to keep up with everyone else. It was just easier for everyone else to learn....maybe because of my learning disabilities. But I felt in elementary and middle school, I could never get to their level. Once I got into high school, and I learned about all the resources like FCE and all the people that supported me, I saw that it is a possibility, but I had to work harder than they did.

I never had an idea of college until I hit my senior year. Nobody even mentioned college to me. When these people are talking about A-G requirements, I don't even know what they were talking about it.

Me too, never heard of it.

They didn't put me in classes that was to designed to help me get to college.

I found out that high school requirements and A-G courses on a piece of paper. Nothing explicit that someone said.

Communication strategies can be improved.

They should talk about college to us really early, when they decide what they want to do in my life. I had dreams but I didn't think they could be reality until I

It's never too early to talk about college. It was introduced to me in elementary school. I had the mindset that when I graduate from high school, I am headed off to college.

When and if you were able to overcome obstacles and challenges, what helped you do that?

At Paly, they have a place where you can request a tutor (AP Student) and helped me raise the grades.

I had a tutor too and I had it for physics. He was really helpful. Counselor or tutor can make a big difference.

Not a lot of people knew about it.

I knew it was there but didn't go until my teacher suggested it.

You have to go there over lunch or prep period, but if you want it you have to be willing to sacrifice it.

It was a small room, so I didn't think it was the right place for me. Most of my help was from my resource class, and _____ to give me the support to go forward and to provide tutors for me (decent ones). What helped me the most was the motivation of my family. In the beginning they just gave me motivation to get A's in class....not about college readiness. When I was old enough, and started listening more, my grandpa was really about education, and my dad told me about his story and how feels now, and it motivated me to want to be the change in my family.

If the space was configured differently (more space or more private), would it make a difference?

I got the sense that when I showed up, "why are you here?" I always got that sense. I didn't feel accepted or wanted. Space doesn't matter. I just didn't feel welcome.

More organization would be beneficial. It is crowded at lunchtime and fight your way through the door and get attention of the lady at the door with the clipboard. Finding space to meet with the tutor was difficult. It would be better to make the

experience better. Need more time to be with your tutor during lunch. 30 minutes is not enough. Need an hour or two to be as helpful as I want it to be.

Structural changes would be beneficial.

Role of your peers in your academic experience?

Freshmen year was negative. I was young and stupid. But once they graduated, I thought again. I like teachers who know me and can relate to me. I just don't like when teachers give you a vibe and judge you.

Class is not supposed to be a fun thing....it's going to be hard. Unless it's like ceramics or something.

We must have gone to class. Your friends chillin' a lot. In class, we took it seriously, but then again, when we were in the same class, we messed around. I mostly felt like being alone.

You can take classes, and you would have the test the period before and share and help each other, and give hints about what to study. Not proper to do, but it was helpful. Peers were helpful....looking out for you.

I have an acquaintance who cut 300 times and there would be people who would just be hanging around in the library. There will always be people whose needs just can't get met. I was condescending to him and he was condescending back. I know people would cut class to get pizza even if was just right after class. You are definitely affected by people. I would cut, until they started Saturday School. I'm not sure what you could do, but there were definitely some negative experiences there.

First two years at Paly, I cut a lot. I didn't really start going to class until their senior year. Freshmen year I had 140 cuts.

Is there anything that could pull you into class?

With people I hang out with, they would talk about cutting class and call it amusing. They would just rather hang out at the table or go out. Didn't do their homework....they felt cool knowing that they were not going to class. That is who I hung out with, but everyone knew me as the innocent one, and I liked being the good one. It actually motivated me more to be different from them.

Junior year to senior year I went to class every day, because . I had to. Teachers knew my situation, and they could . any day.

What would it take to make this district better for minority students?

People need to be more hands-on. Resources are out there. Let everyone know what is out there. More one-on-one or class discussions specifically about the resources. Be hands-on with every student (special ed students, AP students, etc.).

I think what the district is doing now is fine. If we could get the resources out there earlier, that would be helpful.

Make resources more available. Raise awareness of the resources that are there and available. If you weren't in a program, you wanted to be. It's definitely helpful if your teacher is hands-on. You can make the classroom a warm and inviting...a family. I went to [redacted] ...closest 70 kids than even one class of 25 at Paly. I had my teachers' cell phone number. More resources like that and people being more willing to help would be great.

I was told by Paly teachers, "in college it's different, teachers aren't going to come to you". But that's not my experience at [redacted]. The first week of school...the teachers' goal was to get to know us individually and feel comfortable around them. I wish I had that more in high school. In Paly, it was just here is the class lecture. I wish I had more group activities to feel like I could be more comfortable around my teachers. Maybe they should have come to meet the students individually more than just teaching the class. But I do still strongly believe that college should be introduced in middle school.

In middle school they told me that the high school teachers aren't going to be chasing you down. That didn't happen. Then high school teachers said that about college teachers. If the middle school teachers hadn't said that about the high school teachers, I might have been more open...more likely to go up to them.

It's condescending too....because then you scare them before they even enter high school or college. I know one of my teachers would do bonding activities. Community building activity, which could help to make it more like a family feeling in the classroom....to make it more beneficial.

Don't ostracize anyone. Keep everyone involved. Just make everyone feel like they are part of a family.

Maybe for families that struggle....I have three cousins that moved in with me, but it would have been better for them to have been able to go to Paly with me. They are struggling more than I am. They are all the way up in [redacted] e. It would have been easier for us as a family if we all went to Paly.

Second semester of high school students were taken away after a residency agreement. People are trying to kick them out.

Through the _____, more support is needed. I didn't know anyone who was part of the program.....maybe some support in that regard....help them get to know one another.

The _____ families are the ones that need more help in knowing the resources around.

The _____ families are the most first generation students, and need more support and more information.

How well did PAUSD prepare students for college?

Teachers were helpful in high school and they weren't in college
Science program in Paly – Science major at
Senior year Math – huge help

Lot less hand holding in college. Different when you can figure out your grades in high school by going onto Blackboard whenever you'd like.
Homework wise was the exact same amount as college. I felt prepared, especially in mathematics, when the kids next to me hadn't ever seen derivatives before.

Having high expectations.

Felt that English was a help for college. Bio 1 was hard.

What ways could PAUSD have done a better job at preparing your for college?

English program was the biggest disadvantage.

Writing program required different types of writing in college that I never heard of in high school. Seems to be a pattern across our family. But the English program hadn't prepared us.

None of the papers required 5 paragraphs. Has nothing about the
Writing was a bit of a disappointment. Length and amount of writing. 7-9 pages. I had never done anything like that, so it was overwhelming. Government class – covered this once. The idea of doing all of the sources and research. Choose the topic yourself.

Early reviews of your earlier transcript.....what made the difference to make you ready for college?

Motivation

Willingness to proceed and do whatever you need to do
Internal motivation to get the degree and move on in life

Family and outside programs – College trip and realized that I need to pick it up; Grandma told me I need to go to college; had a lot of tutors for all subjects and college counselors at the end of junior year; SAT workshops

Everyone around you is going to be somewhere. It's unheard of to say you aren't going anywhere.

I was in _____, and my counselor helped me motivated me to get to college. Gunn office was also helpful with financial aid and scholarship. I was in _____ counselor in charge of that program (_____ : Counselor) understanding of where she was coming from.

I was planning to go to college the whole time I was in high school. All my siblings and friends went to college and were college educated. I didn't really have a choice.

People or experiences that positively shaped your high school experience?

Science program....astronomy, physics, _____, shaped what I'm doing with my life

Classes were challenging so the transition to college was simple. My cousin struggled in college and came out of HS with straight A's.

Math program was very strong. Bond amongst each other. Super helpful. Worked together and everyone learns the exact same things. Always there for you. Math teachers knew more about me beyond my academic skills. Greater sense of belonging and personal relationships. Can get help from anyone even if they have different teachers/classes. Continuity positive thing.

Same lane in English, don't get the same instruction. English teachers were harder to meet up with them. Not the same in English.

People or experiences that negatively shaped your high school experience?

Vocabulary quizzes, book quizzes on useless facts, 5-paragraph essays useless for college; would have been more helpful to have book discussions and projects. Would prefer more synthesis and analysis around the book reading.

AP History a different story, in regular History I don't think I learned a lot in high school. Most of them aren't really that helpful.

Memorizing facts for a week and then forget about it for the rest of your life. A common issue in high school.

Assessments were questions right out of the textbook were the only thing that we tested.

Difficult to learn from teachers that taught for one specific learning history. U.S. History was engaging and was reviewed throughout the course. World History/Government class....took place during the presidential election...and we learned nothing. Grade was based on whether _____ liked you or not. Teachers were enthusiastic made the difference for learning. Teachers who just asked us to take notes from our textbook were just useless, or watch videos for what we thought were interesting. It's all based on your teachers. Grade based on your tests. I never had to write a paper for a History class. Would have been helpful to have that

experience in high school. Classwork was irrelevant to what we are doing in college. Assignments to pass the time...skills didn't translate.

One of the goals is to increase the number of students meeting A-G courses. What are the obstacles in getting access?

It's not hard to get into any class. Not that difficult. Advisors and teachers can help you change lanes. Made the effort to jump to higher classes. If you sign up for the class, you will likely get it. When it came to math at Gunn, it was difficult to change lanes. She wouldn't let me drop to a lower lane.

I don't think it's hard to fill those requirements with a little effort.

What obstacles are there for getting a C- or better in A-G courses?

All you had to do was show up for class, for tests, not get dropped from the class. Have to do the work to pass the class. You can't just skate by. If you took at least six classes freshman year and five each year after that, you could still graduate with all the requirements. In high school, they want you to pass....you can just meet them half-way. Show them that you are making the effort.

Do you feel you experience any additional obstacles as Black/Hispanic?

I felt myself pushing harder to stay up to speed with my White/Asian peers. More motivation to do better....Pressure to dispel myths of low expectations. At least one teacher each year, who didn't really believe or know why I was in AP courses or the goals I had. Intimidation factor. Group of White/Asian kids that apply to a million schools and got into everywhere. Seeing other kids apply to Princeton, Harvard, Yale,....maybe I could have done that too....but I'm going to enjoy high school and go to the school I really want to. It feels weird when the people around you on high powered going to ivy league schools. Pressure comes from students themselves.

I didn't look Hispanic so I had a different experience. Spanish for Spanish speakers. Motivation for learning was night and day. The Spanish students didn't have a care about the performance.

What might be useful for the students who are disengaged?

If I had grown up in _____, I will have more in common with the neighborhood kids.

I live in _____, and I didn't talk to many of them. It's about early on believing that this is possible. I didn't tell someone right away that I was from _____. It's not a bad thing. Not everyone who lives there is a drug dealer. It started from elementary. Reactions with other students. Self-fulfilling prophecy....you only have to be told one time that you aren't going to be something and that changes your actions. Hearing perceptions creates actions. They need to hear early that they can do well in life.

I definitely had a negative interaction with a teacher. Talked with a teacher about which school to go to. You have to consider . You are not going to end up anywhere if you go to . No teacher should tell you that. Not supported by her teacher and turned her away. Do you have to go to a well-known college? The message from the community is need to think about college name.

What roles did your peers have in your academic experience?

Hearing people you don't know is what makes is challenging. Your peers can have a negative effect. I took AP Psych my senior year and I heard from across the room some student say, " is the smartest I know". Students do joke amongst themselves and say stupid things like that.

My friends treated equally and were always willing to help me if I was struggling in class or to study finals.

What can the district do to better support students of color?

I think that the only thing that will make the difference is if you, yourself, want to do the work. District has offered the tools, and it's up to the student to take advantage of it.

District can make students aware of . I hadn't heard about until I got into high school and I didn't hear about until I got into .

For me it was my counselor, who was , and being able to have that communication. Very important to have the language and cultural experiences similar to yourself.

Programs are there. Students need to know. Supportive parents are important at the young age. By high school you just need to take the initiative yourself. They need to look at the financial aid options. Ask around. I found out about support programs through my counselor and asked questions.

English teacher in 8th grade told about the program.

Need a support group wherever I go to help you through.

Private college counselor in high school to push me a lot harder than parents and counselors. Finding people that have your best interest in class and want you to succeed.

I think it would be interesting to see other minorities that succeeded and help give you some tips about how to be successful yourself (like staff or former students)