



## **CFER Statement on SFUSD School Board's Fast-Track Resolution to Eliminate Academic Selection in the World-Class Lowell High School**

**February 2021**

Californians for Equal Rights Foundation (CFER) issues the following official statement to demonstrate our concerns regarding [an expedited proposal](#) presented to the San Francisco School Board to eliminate academic criteria for admissions at the city's No. 1 public high school, Lowell High. This politicized resolution is wrongheaded and divisive, which would in turn harm all student groups and the school's long-standing academic track record.

For 165 years, Lowell High School has stood out as a beacon of academic excellence and alma mater of four Nobel laureates, a California governor and a Supreme Court Justice. Lowell's success to educate and lift up its students, many of whom come from disadvantaged backgrounds, has relied on a competitive, merit-based process of admissions based on standardized testing, middle school GPA, essay writing and extracurriculars. To improve diversity and representation, Lowell already has [an existing set-aside system](#) to award 30% of its admissions slots to promising underrepresented students who fall below the cut-off test score. The proposal's attempts to reduce Lowell's history to perceived white racism and call for a total eradication of objective academic standards to combat racism are dangerous and counterproductive.

### **Attacking excellence would exacerbate the racial achievement gap**

California's public K-8 education is plagued by [persistent achievement gaps](#), even after socioeconomic factors are controlled. Progressive and woke San Francisco sticks out as the state's [worst county](#) for black student achievement, with nine out of 10 failing state math and reading exams. This abysmal situation has deep roots in housing instability, community breakdown, high rate of turnover among teachers, and a toxic cultural de-emphasis on achievement. To blame this long-standing problem on amorphous systemic racism covers up real challenges that require practical policy solutions to bolster standards. Fresno's Washington Unified School District has [closed the racial achievement gap](#) by 17% in reading and 8% in math by requiring its teachers to raise standards and uphold rigor for students of all racial backgrounds. San Francisco Unified should learn from best practices of its regional counterparts, instead of burying its head in sand.

### **Attacking excellence in the name of anti-racism would heighten racial hatred and division**

SFUSD's fast-track resolution draws from [a political framework](#) of critical race theory in which combating white supremacy, racial microaggressions and other racial abuse becomes an end goal for a high school education. It is a fashion statement that exaggerates racial divisiveness at



Lowell and singles out “Black, Latinx, and Samoan Pacific Islander students” from their peers. SF School Board’s proposed two-phase solutions to conduct an equity audit on Lowell and introduce an “anti-racist” curriculum would encourage racial spoils and create a toxic zero-sum game to re-segregate Lowell students based on skin color.

### **Attacking excellence injures all students including the intended beneficiaries**

Last but not least, this proposal is built upon a delusion that racial proportionality, rather than individual merit, should guide admissions into a scholastic institution like Lowell. It perpetuates racial stereotypes and takes away individual agency from the so-called underrepresented groups, while incur undue harms on the over-represented students who often also come from impoverished backgrounds. All underprivileged students, regardless of race, deserve equal access and treatment in seeking quality education. In the long run, the assault on achievement will create a generation of students ill-equipped for the real world where standards, merit and competence matter in any professional line of work in America and beyond.

In summary, San Francisco School Board’s proposal to do away with academic selection at Lowell represents “destructive destruction”. It would cost the city its world-class public magnet school, compromise timeless American principles and erode social harmony, with no added value to academic rigor or competitiveness. Moreover, this assault on merit must also be understood in the broader context of a nation-wide movement to debase academic standards. The UC system, among other prestigious colleges and universities, is permanently [phasing out standardized testing](#) in its undergraduate admissions. Selective K-12 programs in places including New York City, Boston, Northern Virginia and Maryland are pressured to adopt lottery admissions in place of rigorous academic selection. Step 1 of the United States Medical Licensing Examination is now [pass/fail](#) in an attempt to boost equity. A better solution would be to build constructive relationships among students, teachers and schools, build bridges to encourage best practices and ultimately promote success not victimhood. Above all, equality and merit must be safeguarded as guiding principles.

**About Californians for Equal Rights Foundation (CFER):** CFER is a non-partisan and non-profit organization established following the defeat of Proposition 16 in 2020, with a mission to defend and raise public awareness on the cause of equal rights through public education, civic engagement and community outreach. In 1996, California became the first U.S. state to amend its constitution by passing Proposition 209 to ban racial discrimination and preferences. Prop 209 requires that “the state shall not discriminate against, or grant preferential treatment to, any individual or group on the basis of race, sex, color, ethnicity, or national origin in the operation of public employment, public education, or public contracting.” CFER is dedicated to educating the public on this important constitutional principle of equal treatment. [www.Cferfoundation.org](http://www.Cferfoundation.org).