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Template Letter: Reconsider ‘Crazy Hair Day’

Letter template created by Ijeoma Anyanwu & Kerry Prasad of FORJ at Brown Middle School with support from Raising Luminaries & Newton, MA members

Dear **[School Administrators]**

Community-building is arguably the **[school organization]**'s most important task, and you have done a remarkable job achieving this mission during an unprecedented time. You contributed countless hours to organizing virtual get-togethers, supporting our teachers and enriching our children's educational experience all while things changed from day to day. Thank you for holding together our school communities during this isolating, lonely and uncertain time!

The end of the school year is approaching, which means that PTOs and schools are busy planning fun events including **[name of community celebration days]**! These events are critical to our school communities. They allow kids and adults to embrace their friendships and celebrate the sense of accomplishment that comes with the end of a school year.

[Our family / Organization] has a commitment to outreach and education, and so, as you begin to think about theme days, we encourage you to pause and reflect on whether these themes are inclusive and welcoming to all students in our community.

What implicit messages or values do these themes convey? Who is missing from the conversation about planning these themes?

With this in mind, we wanted to let you know that “Crazy Hair Day,” which has long been a staple in some end-of-year school celebrations, actually harms many children. This information might come as a surprise to many of you, and that is OK! We want to make you aware of it so you can take it into account as you make your end-of-year plans.

To those of us who grew up in the dominant white culture, the “Crazy Hair Days” of our youth might bring back fond childhood memories. However, “Crazy Hair Day” is racist because it sends a message that BIPOC hair and cultural styles are less desirable, bizarre, or otherwise outside what is natural and normal. This day intended to build community has become a reminder of white supremacy, particularly for Black students.

On crazy hair day, students are generally invited to wear their hair in a “wild” or “wacky” fashion. The problem is that many of the hairstyles popular on crazy hair day are cultural hairstyles for Black people. In

deeming those styles “crazy,” we send the message that there’s something wrong with them. It’s a microaggression, but it’s also part of the hidden curriculum that makes whiteness the norm. And let’s not forget that Black girls are disproportionately policed and disciplined for how they wear their hair. - Kimmie Fink, [WeAreTeachers.org](https://www.weareteachers.org/)

Black hair, with its deep cultural significance and beautiful texture, takes time and effort to care for. It can be braided, twisted, or worn as an Afro, but none of these are “crazy” or “wacky;” they are hairstyles. Even if a parent tries to style their Black child's hair to participate, they are forced to misappropriate their own culture by labeling a traditionally Black hairstyle “crazy.”

When non-Black children wear braids, beads and Afro wigs on “Crazy Hair Day,” we send the message that culturally Black hairstyles are laughable, aberrant and unnatural. This teaches our children that it’s funny for non-Black children to wear certain hairstyles, while Black children are humiliated and punished for their natural hair and cultural traditions. Black children have been kicked out of school, adults have been refused interviews, lost their jobs, and worse, for wearing their hair naturally or culturally in Black styles. Black women’s hair is held to white standards of beauty that are impossible to maintain.

[Read more by Black writer Relando Thompkins- Jones.](#)

[For folks who’d like to listen to learn, rather than/in addition to reading.](#) (The actual podcast begins around 3 minutes in.)

Finally, we are in the midst of a serious and widespread childhood mental health crisis brought on by the pandemic, and we all must consider the impact of casually derogatory words such as “crazy.” This word stigmatizes people with mental health conditions, making it harder for them to reach out for help. Our children are experiencing mental health challenges in record numbers right now. We must do the work to make sure they know that we support and love them. Using the word “crazy” as a joke and an insult pushes students experiencing mental health issues to the margins and isolates them when they most need support. To learn more, check out this article on [sanism](#).

This information may be unnerving - it is startling to learn something we thought was innocent is actually harmful and that we may have inadvertently hurt people in the past.

As Dr. Maya Angelou wrote, *“When you know better, you do better.”*

We’ve come a long way and are constantly learning how we can be more inclusive and respectful of all people. As PTO leaders, you have a great opportunity to address this issue and to make a better community for our children!

It is hard to be a **[school admin]** leader and to make a change like this, especially if families have come to expect “Crazy Hair Day.” You might be worried about getting blowback and criticism from families at school.

You may be thinking, “It’s not worth the complaints from the other parents. I’m just a volunteer! This job is thankless enough as it is, for crying out loud!” We understand and are here to support you in your leadership, just as you support our families and teachers every day through your valuable work in the **[organization]**.

If you want to make a change, but are not sure how, reach out to through the addresses linked below. If you need language to communicate to your school community, we welcome you to use this letter in part or whole in your weekly newsletter.

We look forward to continuing to work together on this issue and others. By working together and supporting one another, we will build a stronger community!

Thank you for your consideration!

Sincerely,

[your name]

[your organization/school]