

Dear HWRHS Students, Guests, Parents, and Community Members:

We want to reach out to you all about what occurred at our junior prom on Friday, April 29. We know many of you are aware of what happened already, but we want to further clarify what happened, address some common questions, and share how we plan to work to heal from this.

During prom, a radio-edited song with the n-word was played. During this song, some students yelled the n-word over the bleep. Many other students heard this racial slur and left the dance floor, while some left the event altogether. While we hope that students didn't intentionally target anyone directly, this act of hate speech was still impactful and made many students of all races upset and uncomfortable.

After some chaperones and student council members talked with other students to learn more about what had occurred, they agreed that the best decision would be to end prom. From there our principal proceeded to make a speech informing students of what happened and that prom would be shut down early.

We are aware of the conversations on social media and in our school regarding what happened at prom and our decision to end it early. Below are some common concerns we've seen from students and parents, and our responses. We hope that this provides clarification and prevents the spread of misinformation and further harm after what happened.

- *Prom shouldn't have ended early for everyone just because a few students did something wrong.*
 - We agree that in general, it is best to punish students for their actions instead of punishing everyone for something only a few students did. However, in this instance, we did not know specifically who said the n-word. Knowing how hurtful this word is and seeing how many students' nights were ruined because a few people said it, we couldn't continue like everything was normal, and instead chose to end prom early to show that this type of racist language is not tolerated.
- *Why did the DJ play a song with the n-word?*
 - The DJ we used at our prom this year is trusted by our school and has been used for many proms over the years. As is customary with school dances, all music played was radio appropriate and all offensive words were bleeped out.
- *It isn't the students' fault, playing a song with the n-word enables students to say it.*
 - If students know the lyrics to a song well enough to be able to sing along, they can also know when an offensive word is coming up and stop themselves. All songs were well-known songs that have been played at proms before. This is not a matter of ignorance, but inexcusable and purposeful hate speech. As high school students, it is incredibly unlikely that anyone at prom didn't know the impact of the word and that it shouldn't be said. Further, in response to comments that we should avoid playing any songs with that word: the erasure of certain genres of music and a subset of Black culture from our school events

simply in order to eliminate the chances for students to say a slur is not how we are going to move on from this.

- *What are you doing to fix what happened?*
 - This Monday, May 2, the junior class met with school administrators and student council members to discuss what happened. We talked about the harm that has been done and how we are all responsible for working to move on from it together as a unified class. School administrators are investigating the incident further in order to make sure students are held accountable for their actions. We also plan to have a school-wide educational presentation focused on the history of racial slurs like the one used at prom and the impact of those words today.

What happened at prom affects all of us, regardless of whether or not you were at prom, whether or not you feel personally attacked by the use of the word, and whether or not you ever have said or even considered saying it. When hate speech is used, it is up to all of us to right the wrongs of what happened, and look inwards to see how we - ourselves and our community - can do better.

If you know more about who was involved in the incident at prom, please come forward so we can work with those students (you will be kept anonymous). If you still find yourself struggling to understand why the use of the n-word is an issue, do some research and find reputable sources to help you learn more about it. Educate your children, friends, and parents on the impact of our words so we can prevent future harm.

We care about everyone in our school, and when even one of us doesn't feel safe and supported, it is up to all of us to fix it, and we will continue to work with our classmates and school administrators in order to do so.

- The Class of 2023 Officers and Representatives