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Our commitment to racial justice

Since 1952, The George Gund Foundation has been an ardent supporter of public education, and we continue to work with our heroic community partners to provide equitable access to high-quality education and career opportunities for Cleveland youth and families. The Cleveland Metropolitan School District (CMSD) boasts a vibrant, PreK–12 student body comprised of scholars who come from various racial, ethnic, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds. According to a [CMSD fast facts infographic](#), 63.8 percent of CMSD scholars identify as African-American; 17.2 percent as Hispanic; 14.5 percent as White; and 4.5 percent are listed as other.

Whenever I visit a CMSD school building, I always leave feeling inspired by the abundance of diverse faces, their respective lived experiences, their brilliance, and their unwavering resilience. In racially and culturally diverse settings, we are able to learn with and from other people and communities, but such settings also present opportunities for us to 1) look inwardly and learn about ourselves; 2) examine and challenge our assumptions, beliefs, and values; and 3) work toward becoming the best version of ourselves. Diversity is our superpower, and it is perhaps the only thing that can truly shape the future of our country and

humanity for the better.

Yesterday, the U.S. Supreme Court majority—in a landmark ruling—held that U.S. colleges and universities can no longer consider race as a basis for college admissions. As an African-American, first-generation college student, who had to overcome racism, poverty, and homelessness in pursuit of a college education and upward mobility, I am deeply appreciative and unapologetic about the fact that race played a role in my college admission process. SCOTUS got it wrong: race-based affirmative action is still very much needed to ensure equitable access to higher education and to prevent both intentional and unintentional discriminatory practices in college admissions.

When I applied to college, my academic profile paled in comparison to my white and suburban school counterparts, but the admissions team saw something in me that challenged both traditional notions of academic excellence and indicators of college success. Far too often institutions of higher education use trivial gatekeeping measures such as culturally-biased standardized testing, expected family contribution, and legacy/college affiliation as a basis for admissions. Such practices are inherently discriminatory, as they create a bar to access for first-generation college students—especially those who come from historically marginalized groups and under resourced families. In addition to barring access to higher education, these discriminatory practices help widen and perpetuate existing gaps in educational attainment, financial security, and other pertinent life outcomes between white people and other racial/ethnic groups.

I am extremely fortunate.

Thankfully, Oberlin College's admissions team employed a holistic review of my candidacy. They saw grit, resiliency, a high grade-point average, a rigorous course load, glowing letters of support, community service, extracurricular activities, *and* a young, Black man whose lived experience could bring a unique

perspective to classroom discussions and to the campus community at large. Moreover, the admissions team got it right: while race is a social construction, it is a *real* phenomenon that has real *life* ramifications in our country and beyond. Simply put, race matters! As history suggests, when declarations of “equality” or “opportunity for all” go unchecked, policies and practices that give rise to disparate treatment and/or disparate impact tend to ensue. Given our turbulent and unreconciled past, any effort or pursuit of “equality” will fall short as equality is not a substitute for or a viable pathway to justice and/or wellbeing.

The United States of America’s record on racism is dismal, and while the SCOTUS majority and various elected officials—quite erroneously—believe they can legislate racism out of our country’s collective consciousness, racism is deeply embedded into the fabric of our country’s DNA, public/private institutions, and citizenry. Is it possible to achieve a full-fledged democracy where policymakers lack empathy, compassion, and sensitivity to the harsh realities of structural, systemic, and institutional racism? At The George Gund Foundation, we remain firmly committed to supporting our partners in education, along with the plethora of students and families deeply affected by SCOTUS’ callous and unpatriotic decision to eliminate race-conscious admissions at colleges and universities.



Tony Richardson, President

