

May 20, 2019

Dear OPRF High School Students, Families, and Staff,

I'm writing to provide an update about publication of the yearbook. First, however, I want to recognize our students and advisers who have put their hearts and souls into this publication. This has been an extremely difficult time for them, and I appreciate their hard work.

At a special meeting this evening, the Board of Education approved an expenditure of \$53,794 to reprint the 2018-2019 "Tabula," which will take about three to four weeks. In the meantime, we will provide all students who ordered yearbooks with an autograph book from Jostens. This eight-page bound book of heavy cardstock is the same size as the yearbook pages. Along one edge of the book is a strip of adhesive; students can peel off the protective strip then neatly adhere the pages right into their yearbook. We have historically handed these out to seniors at the barbecue held after graduation rehearsal, in case they need more room for signatures.

In addition, on a date to be announced, the district will host a *Yearbook Distribution/Senior Send-Off Party*. All students will be invited to enjoy free lunch and music while they pick up their yearbooks and exchange signatures with their friends. Any yearbooks that are not picked up that day will be mailed to students.

The yearbook is being reprinted because it contained 18 photos of clubs or teams in which students of various races, ethnicities, genders, and grades made a hand gesture--an upside-down OK sign--that has different meanings. In some cases, it's used in what is known as the circle game. However, the sign has more recently become associated with White nationalism. The photos in question, as well as all the other club team/photos in which students are striking poses and making gestures, will be replaced with the straight-forward group shots.

Use of the upside-down OK to mean White Power is an emerging issue. According to the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), in 2017 members of the website 4chan came up with a hoax to falsely promote the gesture as a hate symbol. However, the ADL says, as of this year, at least some White supremacists are using the gesture as an actual symbol of White Power.

Recent media events have heightened public awareness of the symbol's newer implications. The shooter who killed 50 people at a mosque in Christchurch, New Zealand, flashed the sign in court on March 16, 2019. Wrigley Field has banned a White man who made the gesture behind a Black broadcaster at the Chicago Cubs game on May 7.

The "Tabula" photographs in question were taken of clubs or teams in mid-October. Those pages were reviewed and shipped to the printer in early December, before the gesture was widely known to have any association with white nationalism. I want to be clear that we are not making any presumptions about students' intent in using the gesture.

Regardless of intent, however, there is a real and negative impact. Many students, not only our students of color, experience this gesture as a symbol of White supremacy. Potentially subjecting our students to this trauma is simply not acceptable.

Oak Park and River Forest High School is on the leading edge of addressing this issue. We are concerned that the gesture will become more closely associated with White supremacy in the future. Publishing the photos in question could not only harm students today but could subject students to potentially a lifetime of questions or penalty from colleges, employers, etc.

Jostens, which publishes the yearbook, worked with the district to reduce the cost from the original price of \$85,000. While putting stickers over the photos would be a cheaper solution, it would draw attention to particular groups of students and place a cloud of suspicion over all the students in those photos, regardless of whether they used the sign or not.

We understand the importance of the yearbook to students, especially graduating seniors, and we appreciate our school community's patience as we have worked through this situation as quickly as possible. While not all will agree with the district's decision to reprint the yearbook, we feel confident that once students are holding the final "Tabula" in their hands, it truly will represent "Those Things That are Best."

Sincerely,  
Dr. Joylynn Pruitt-Adams  
Superintendent