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Dear Peters Township School Board,

We, the council of the borough of Swissvale, are writing regarding the football game on October 30, 2020 between Woodland Hills and Peters Township. As you are likely aware, there is a photo circulating that shows the drum majors of your school district's high school band in full black morph suits offset with white clothing and a wig over the suits, and further contrasted with white masks. We want to amplify the voices of our neighbors and children in our community who found these costumes to be offensive.

Regardless of whether there was any intentional malice on the part of your children, this was perceived negatively and can be placed along a continuum of black face insults that have been repudiated and denounced as highly racially insensitive and certainly provocative. This type of behavior between our two school districts is not a new experience and unfortunately the coaches and athletic staff of our district must give players a "talk" before entering into your district. This is to prepare them for such negative behavior and urges our children to ignore the racial slurs that are hurled their way while they are guests in your facilities. This is racialized intimidation that seems to be part of a pattern of our interactions with you district. We know that our districts can do better, and we say that enough is enough. Our communities need to take a stand against this behavior and not foster the harmful rhetoric that "this was children playing" or "they did not mean those words that way," as a way of diminishing the outrage at the insult.

There is plenty of culpability to go around, the students, parents, the band director, Milt Barney, who according to the Tribune Review, told Ron Coursey that he didn't think it [the costume] would be offensive. If your school district is that lacking in diversity training that adult staff members do not recognize actions that could be perceived as racist, then that reveals the existence of a systemic problem within your district.

We think that as responsible representative members of our communities that this issue needs to be addressed and not swept under the rug with sincere apologies but continued behavior. We hope that this can be a teachable moment and that we can use this incident as a means look closely at how these behaviors are fostered. What processes are going to be put into place to prevent anything like this from happening again. What additional corrections to the educational

environment need to be rooted out to find the blind spots that enable behavior like this to continue unchecked.

There are many things that can be done but words without concrete steps behind them to rectify the problem will just allow things to continue as they have been.

Here are a few suggested concrete steps you can take to rectify this problem:

1. Recognize that you have a problem. This problem is systemic, and it is affecting the children and their perception of acceptable behavior and the school district's ability to perceive acceptable behavior.
2. As a board you need to firmly denounce these actions so that it is known that this is not acceptable. As leaders in the community you have a strong voice, and it should be loudly proclaiming that this is not who you are or who you want to be perceived as.
3. After acknowledging the problem, have your entire educational staff on all levels (elementary, secondary, administration) participate in racial sensitivity and anti-bias training.
4. Adjust your curriculum for all ages of your students to begin to help them develop empathy and understand the experiences of others, which might be different from their own. Assign books written by non-white authors which directly speak to this issue.
5. Find a way to engage parents. Students do not develop these insensitive perspectives in a vacuum.
6. Let's work together to host joint community meetings to engage in the issues of race in America. We can be the leadership and example to our community and children of how to foster unity and respect for each other.

These are not exhaustive suggestions, but we would like to see some progress on your part to prevent these types of conversations from being necessary in the future. It takes a village to raise a child. Are you willing to be a bridge to the future and growth, or an albatross locked into past patterns and doomed to repeat them?

Sincerely,  
Swissvale Borough Council