

Vetting report for **Justin Smith**, Junior at Downington West.

On March 1st, I had a phone call with Nicole Lipkin, who works with Justin in Black Student Union at Downington West. Nicole has been getting PPRR calls for years and this year she nominated Justin because she was so impressed by him.

Nicole described to me that Downington is a predominantly white school, and that the black student union (BSU) has fallen wayside for years. In the past year, Justin worked with her to restart BSU and to bring the first ever MLK day of service to the community. He is the leader and driver behind the revival of BSU, and was elected President by his peers. Justin is the leader and engine in driving a much of BSU's efforts and for driving MLK Day of service for the school as well as the community.

BSU revival and MLK day of service were met with weariness and skepticism by the predominantly white school community. There were racial incidences at the school where the N word was used. Justin has been critical leading BSU's restart and for initiating the first MLK Day of service. Justin had pitched the idea of MLK day of service to the entire faculty and utilized the message of togetherness of the community to get the faculty on board. He had an appointment with the Principal to share with him/her the student experiences and to help generate a dialogue of care and understanding. He worked to diffuse the "threat" felt by the community and emphasized inclusion. He went to different clubs, and to different groups of people (black or white) to get people to come out, and to get the opportunity to speak to black and white peers. Nicole said that Justin was the voice of reason and had a knack for bringing people together.

The MLK day brought about 100 people together on a day when people typically took off for vacation. It had broad participation from both within and outside the school community: younger children, older students, faculty, staff, and parents. There were announcements and videos made prior to the event, there were numerous activities including writing letters for servicemen, a peace march, artistic activities which include painting an MLK mural, quilts for Al Dupont, and younger folks were also involved.

It made a big impact on the community, and a local paper covered the event.

(https://www.dailylocal.com/news/local/volunteering-in-the-name-of-mlk/article_942813f6-1dae-11e9-a192-bf863c41ded6.html) The community walked away with new sense of appreciation and value. They are in the process of continuing this next year and scaling up the event.

Justin is seen as a leader by his peers. He is articulate, advocates for others, delivers a message in a way that doesn't offend and create defensiveness. He is an excellent student at the top 3-5 percent of his class. He is well accepted by the various groups within the community, seen as "one of them" and yet allowed to lead.

It is my recommendation that he **receives certificate of recognition**, and that we also **follow up with him to encourage him to reapply next year**.

Regards,

Linda