

March Chalk Talk Profile:



Ty Schwoeffermann

I have Caribbean mother and American father and one brother and two sisters. We all grew up in Portland. This year I will marry the love of my life Cimone Campbell. We met while I attended University of Oregon at a Black Student Union meeting.

I am passionate about direct action organizing especially communities of color in Oregon. I have been working over the last several years on issues around access to education. Most recently I worked in NE Portland for the Obama Campaign as a field organizer.

What motivated you to decide to work with the Black Parent Initiative?

Two fold, first I really have a passion for working with motivated people who want to find solutions to the institutional problems. And secondly I really wanted to be a part of an organization that embraces the traditional black cultural ties to the church. My background is grounded in my understanding of who I am and also my belief that America can be as good as its promise. That is precisely why I fit so well with this organization because BPI does not just talk about action, we are also working towards change. The Achievement Gap is a big problem that I hope I have an impact on over the coming years.

After the release of the Achievement Gap data what are the next steps you would like to see taken for the current and future generations of Oregon students? Specifically, how are you going to galvanize the community?

I realize that this effort is going to take the entire community. At BPI we follow an African Proverb "it takes a community to raise a child". The achievement gap will

only close if we as a community decide to make it a priority. I will organize a coalition of parents and community organizations, and work established partners like United Way and Portland Schools foundation, to focus efforts towards changing the achievement gap.

The many officials that gave their endorsement to this crucial issue must stay engaged. Officials have so much power to make changes in our community, so my job will be facilitating a conversation to make sure that we are addressing the needs of the community and that we stay focused on closing the achievement gap.

Parents and families of Black children's, multiracial families, and mixed families must get involved in a meaningful way. It will take a huge outreach effort to get these families involved in closing the achievement gap. Partnering with other communities of color and any allies to this struggle is also important. Our coalition will be 100% inclusive for anyone who wants to work towards closing the achievement gap.

Finally, the Black church will play a key role in partnering with schools in innovative ways. The Christian community could have a far reaching impact on the schools. There are a number of service projects that some churches are already engaged in such as, after school tutoring, school cleanup projects, and mentorship as well.

Research has shown a quality educator can go a long way in closing the Achievement Gap. Were there any teachers you had growing up in the Oregon Public School system that made a positive impact on your life as they strove to emphasize equality amongst all students?

I was very fortunate to have attended a magnet school Ainsworth, which taught me Spanish. That school was so far out of my district that I had to ride the bus for an hour and a half each way. I grew up in Sellwood. My parents always put a lot of emphasis on education my dad taught me a lot of important skills like carpentry, fishing, and construction. My mom was always teaching me reading and writing skills. My parents were probably my best teachers.

In school I had some great teachers. I remember my first and second grade teachers very visibly. They were great at making the class room very welcoming and fun to learn in. I remember that my third grade teacher became close friends with my family. I learned Spanish and reading and writing in both Spanish and English in those grades. I was fortunate to have had teachers from all nationalities and cultures at Ainsworth.

In middle school I graduated from the second class at Winter haven, which was a new experimental school at the time. I had the same math teacher for three years, he was tough on me and always encouraged me to succeed.

At Cleveland high school my cross country coach and English teacher was a great guy. I thought of him as a life coach. He taught me a lot of cool stuff about

how to live a positive life, but also to stand up for what I believe in. He really brought out the work ethic in me and applied it to something positive.