

Source: The Wilmington Star | SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 24, 2001

200 White Students Choose Not to Attend Black History Show

By C.J. CLEMMONS

It was a slight that black students at Whiteville High School won't soon forget.

More than 200 white students signed out Thursday before a Black History Month program at the school. About 75 other white students skipped the program "without permission," according to Associate Principal Vicki Frink-Lawrence, who is black.

The student body of 752 is evenly divided between white and black students, Ms. Lawrence said.

The majority of the white students who left school submitted written notes from their parents stating that they needed to be excused for doctor, dental and personal appointments, Ms. Lawrence said.

Since the black history program was held during the last period of the day, the students did not return.

"If that's what their parents felt they should do, we have to honor school policy," Ms. Lawrence said. The black students, she said, feel "disappointed and hurt" at the actions of their white classmates.

"Personally, I'm disappointed," Ms. Lawrence said. "I feel that it was a program we could have celebrated together. We should all have a common focus. I'm sorry everybody didn't go to the program." Ms. Lawrence said there have been no racial problems at the school.

The Black History Month program, which lasted for about an hour, featured music and speakers. Ribbons were handed out for students to wear that said "Celebrate Diversity."

Senior Crystal Gore, 18, who is black, said she thinks white students weren't interested in the program because they felt it showed favoritism to the black students.

"In school, we learn about U.S. and European history from a white person's standpoint every day," she said. "They couldn't take just one day to see our program. If it had been a National Honor Society induction, no one would have been able to leave."

About 50 white students remained in school for the program, Ms. Lawrence said.

"Some said they stayed because they wanted to learn," Ms. Gore said.

The matter was discussed Friday during an elective course on African-American history. Ms. Gore petitioned the school board to start the class last year. Many white students signed the petition, but there are no white students in the 32-member elective class.