

Feb. 1, 2021

To the Judges:

Kusema Thomas II was excited about sixth grade; a new school, one that he applied to get into. In early 2020 he and his father, also Kusema, looked ahead with hope.

All of that started unraveling by mid-March when schooling became virtual and Kusema was taking his computer to his grandmother's house where he shared space with several cousins. By August he was looking forward to starting anew at Stephen M. White Middle School STEAM Magnet in the Los Angeles Unified School District. That's when a series of glitches and dead-ends turned his first six weeks of school into a nightmare.

Lost application, computer login problems, hardware malfunctioning, zoom rooms that kept him out and teachers and principals who never did connect with him to get him into the virtual classroom and the tutoring he needed to catch up.

This story is Kusema's but also his father, Kusema who stuck by his son, insisting that this Black father wanted to be involved and wanted to help his son excel in school. He knows he should have shown up at the school within the first few days of problems, but doing that would have cost him time and money from his job as a community counselor. He did end up going to school several times and got some help but not all that his son needed to take his place among the other students. He was a proud Black father and all he wanted was to give his son a chance.

"When he grows up, I want him to remember that his dad fought for him in every sense and aspect of his life."

As of Nov. 15, Kusema had not yet heard any information from the district about tutoring for his son.

Outstanding issues remain like how to erase all of the absences and F's from Kusema's report card and how and when the special help would be coming.

An accompanying video helped to tell this story.

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Thank you for your consideration.



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