

A letter for Austin to reflect his legacy

Austin, you were such a joy and blessing to your mother, sisters and family. Your demeanor and presence was always calm, cool, and collected. You were an amazing athlete who participated in many track events. You were a versatile athlete who was able to pivot from track to baseball flawlessly as you made JV baseball as a freshman. You put in work over the summer that year to walk into JV baseball. You were committed to your athleticism, but equally your academics because you were a scholar athlete. This was unfortunately interrupted amidst covid, but you persisted because of your joy of the outdoors.

You enjoyed walks with your mom as the sun set on summer nights. You enjoyed the feeling of fresh air while riding your bike. You contributed to your own wellness through the outdoors. You engaged in week long fishing trips with family to honor yourself and enjoy family time. You were such an amazing brother for your sisters. Your heavy cheeks with a baby face smile is the continued imprint that will be on our minds and souls. Everytime we were in your presence you always greeted those you loved with a hug and your warm smile. I honor the sweet, calm swag that you brought into a space you blessed.

You were blessed to have your mother and father as a part of your educational journey. You were excited to be with your dad to wrap up your high school journey with a fresh start this year at a new school. Your mother was overjoyed about your continued academic progress toward graduating this year. Your abilities to continuously show up for yourself in ways to humanize yourself along your schooling journey is to be commended and honored. You were such a creative genius that deserved so much more from your schooling experiences. You did well in school because your intellectual prowess came easy to you at such an early age. Science and math did not baffle you nor did social studies or literature. Your ability to breeze through your math and science courses brought you joy and kept you enamored with your commitment to education. Amidst navigating your schooling experiences you still managed to maintain high grades for your future dreams of being an engineer. We honor and remember you as the son, brother, and future engineer you were endeavoring to be.

I know that your story is your story. But, unfortunately it is not unique amidst the Black male experience. Your legacy and life should not simply be valued because of who you were endeavoring to be. But, simply because of who you are.

My questions that I wish our schooling systems would have asked and honored through the eyes of Austin are:

Austin, did you feel valued in your schooling context?

Did you have any moments of dignity that you cherished in your schooling experience?

How would you have reinvisioned your schooling experience to honor your needs?

Did you feel a deserved sense of belonging?

Austin, how could we have honored you with a deeper ethic of care?