

Magic Johnson's Son and Daughter-in-Law Weigh in on Viral Debate After NYT Writer's Regrets on Daughter's Schooling (Exclusive)

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The couple created the nonprofit Private School Village in 2018, a parent-led organization that works in partnership with schools to “make sure our children feel seen and valued”



Lisa and Andre Johnson / Nikole Hannah-Jones. Credit :
Jon Kopaloff/Getty; Leigh Vogel/Getty

NEED TO KNOW

- Magic Johnson's eldest son and daughter-in-law, Andre and Lisa Johnson, share their take on Nikole Hannah-Jones' viral *Times* essay about schooling
- The couple created the nonprofit Private School Village in 2018 to address the lack of community for Black and brown students in private schools

- “Tension is there,” Lisa says of the choice “privileged” minority families have when deciding between public or private school for their children

[Lisa and Andre Johnson](#) were far too busy to read [Nikole Hannah-Jones’ New York Times article](#) when it hit their feeds on the morning of Sept. 20.

When Lisa, the daughter-in-law of NBA great [Earvin “Magic” Johnson](#), first saw the headline — [In Fighting for Every Black Child, Did I Betray My Own?](#)— and realized Jones was laying bare the complicated results of her choice to enroll her daughter in an under-resourced public school, she immediately put a pin in it.

“I was throwing a back-to-school picnic for 2,200 Black and Brown private school families the day that it came out,” she says. “But I remember thinking I’ve got to come back to it.”



High schoolers attend Private School Village picnic on Sept. 20, 2026.

Courtesy Private School Village

The picnic in question is an annual gathering that she and her husband, Andre, host as part of their nonprofit organization, [Private School Village](#) (PSV).

Now in its eighth year, PSV is a parent-led organization that works in partnership with schools to “make sure our children feel seen, valued, supported, and connected through

an experience that can often be hugely isolating,” Lisa explains.

Back in 2018, Lisa and Andre, the [eldest son](#) of five-time NBA champion Johnson, had the idea to get a few friends with kids in different private schools together for a picnic. But word spread, and “it quickly turned into 500 or so people showing up,” says Andre, who shares son Avery and daughter Gigi with Lisa. “We thought, ‘Oh, this is bigger than just getting together at the park. There’s actually a need for community here.’ ”

Now, PSV offers a robust slate of programming to support students, families and partner schools, including historically Black college and university tours and weekend programming.

“We’ve got grade-level social pods and we’re kind of hiding the veggies in the sauce,” says Lisa. “So we’re also doing a lot of racial literacy training that is a vital protective layer for Black and Brown kids.”



Celebrity Hair Stylist Angela Styles Offers Touch Ups and Tutorials in the Sienna Naturals Crown Tent at the 2026 PSV Picnic.

Courtesy Private School Village

For example: “What to do the first time you hear a racial slur; the first time someone comes and touches your big curly hair because you’re in a grade that has one or two

kids who look like you? How do you anticipate and respond to that moment from a place of joy and not let it shrivel you or other you in any kind of way?”

For Andre, who attended a public middle school that was predominantly white, he remembers one terrifying incident growing up.

“Me and two friends of mine would always walk to school together through this big field every day,” he explains.



Magic Johnson and his son, Andre Johnson at Van Nuys airport in October, 2005 in Van Nuys, California. Gregory Bojorquez/Getty

“One day we heard the sound of a car in the background. Then the car’s getting closer and closer, and there’s rock ‘n’ roll music blaring. The driver starts yelling the N-word and swerving toward us. We ran in zig-zags toward the school and told the principal, and they found out it was a boy who went to the high school across the street,” he recalls.

It was part of the reason his mother, Melissa Mitchell, moved him to a predominantly Black public high school across town.

“My identity, everything changed. I didn’t necessarily have to worry about how I see myself. I could wear an afro and it was cool,” he says.



Lisa (far left) and Andre Johnson (far right) with son Avery and daughter Gigi.
Courtesy Private School Village

His wife attended private schools, where she says she was one of two Black students for most of her education. Outside of the “great academic experience” the school offered, “there were a lot of microaggressions, a lot of confusion,” Lisa says. “It was not a great social and emotional experience. I spent a good deal of the time just counting down the days until graduation.”

That’s why when she finally had time to sit and read Hannah-Jones’ article last week, where the [1619 Project](#) writer details her daughter’s struggles at an under-resourced predominantly Black public school in New York City, she knew one thing to be true: “In the United States, there’s no perfect schooling.”

While Hannah-Jones has received both praise and criticism over her choice to send her daughter to a racially diverse, low-performing school when her family had the means to afford a better education, Lisa says, “I am grateful she was so honest. No matter the situation or choice, there’s a cost, but really you’ve got to listen to your child. They’re the ones dealing with the consequences of an imperfect system in real time.”

As for those who have turned Jones' family experience into a debate over whether Black and Brown families are better served at private schools or should be in service to enriching struggling public schools, Lisa says, "That tension absolutely exists. We are privileged. But where the challenge is, is there's an extra layer of assumption around being in private school, that privilege negates every need. But there's still real challenges when you are enrolled in private school."

She continues, "We are sandwiched between perpetually having to defend the choice to others who are like, 'Why aren't you pouring into the public school system?' And also trying to articulate to the schools that we are in what our experience is like and why we need certain solutions. Instead of getting caught in this never-ending debate over which is better, I choose to live in the space of what are we doing right now?"



Young children attend 2026 PSV picnic.
Courtesy Private School Village

Lisa and Andre's answer to that has been to create a space for community and belonging among Black and Brown families in private schools in hopes of expanding their reach to public schools one day.

This year, PSV launched the [Belonging Report Card](#), a free, parent-guided resource designed to be used regularly alongside traditional academic report cards.

Says Lisa, “There’s infrastructure for everything else in school: performing arts, athletics, academics. Belonging needs that same type of intentionality and resourcing.”

It’s one more step towards serving the community the way Andre’s dad taught him to. “My dad has influenced me 100%,” he says of Johnson’s longstanding dedication to [community service](#) and philanthropic endeavors in marginalized communities. “All we knew is community. So I know it makes him feel good to see both of us in terms of PSV and even what my siblings are doing.”



From left: Magic Johnson, daughter Elisa, wife Cookie, granddaughter Gigi, grandson Avery, daughter-in-law Lisa and son Andre.

Courtesy Private School Village

Adds Lisa, “Earvin and [wife] Cookie’s names are synonymous with being for, by and of the community. They created a mold for that. And they have been some of PSV’s strongest supporters financially. They so could have had this trajectory and never looked back and they’ve not done that ever.”

When it comes to their children, Andre says their goal is to make sure they “just become good people.”

He adds, “We can’t predict what they’re going to do job-wise. We can’t predict what’s going to make them happy in the world. What we can give them is the morals, the ethics, the values, how to treat people, how to show up with kindness, how to lead with love. Those are the things that we instill in them. The question as parents is what institution is going to embody that for the eight or nine hours that they have them every day.”