



Board of Directors

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February 23, 2024

Roz Rothstein, CEO
Carly F. Gammill, Director, Center for Combating Antisemitism
StandWithUs
P.O. Box 341069
Los Angeles, CA 90034-1069

Re: Complaint Regarding Staff Member and Elementary Curriculum

Dear Ms. Rothstein and Ms. Gammill:

This letter is in response to your written complaint dated January 17, 2024, received by Shoreline Public Schools ("SPS" or "the District") regarding instructional materials presented to students at Syre Elementary School. Your complaint raised concerns that on or around December 5, 2023, elementary teacher [REDACTED] presented a Social Studies lesson that contained misinformation and espoused "anti-Israel" rhetoric and presented a pro-Palestinian perspective that included "inaccuracies present as facts." You allege that this lesson was antithetical to the District's policies, specifically citing Board Policy 5015¹ (Diversity – Human Dignity) and Board Policy and Procedure 2311 and 2311P (Selection and Adoption of Instructional material).²

The District initiated an investigation into the allegations in your complaint under the following policies: Board Policy 5015 (Diversity – Human Dignity); Board Policy 2330 (Academic Freedom); and Board Policy 2331 (Controversial Issues). Given the allegations in the complaint specific to Ms. Tupou, the District further investigated the complaint under Board Policy 4312/4312P (Complaints Concerning Staff or Programs). The investigation included interviewing [REDACTED] another Syre Elementary second-grade teacher, and Syre Elementary Principal Michelle Carroll.

¹ The complaint references Policy 5105, which does not exist. However, based on the language quoted in the complaint, I believe you intended to cite Board Policy 5015 (Diversity – Human Dignity).

² The complaint was initially referred for investigation under Board Policy 3210/3210P due to the allegations of "bias" and "bigotry" contained in the complaint. However, after further review, we determined that the allegations concerned complaints about curriculum materials and a complaint against a staff member and did not contain specific allegations on behalf of a District student or allegations that a student was excluded from District programs or services based on their religion, as contemplated by Policy 3210. As a result, the complaint was investigated under the above-referenced policies and procedures.

The investigation also included review of relevant documents and emails, including review of the lesson materials that were presented to the students and the District's adopted curriculum and curriculum standards. Based on the District's investigation, I make the following factual findings and conclusions regarding whether the lesson complied with District policy.

First, I find that the materials used as part of the lesson were not part of the District's approved curriculum, nor were they approved by the building principal. The materials were created using outside sources, and they did not align with the District's second grade curriculum (Since Time Immemorial). The lesson also did not align with the District's Social Studies Learning Standard 2.3.1 in the following ways: (1) it did not adhere to understanding various points of view within an argument; (2) it lacked proper questioning techniques and connecting supporting questions to compelling questions; and (3) it did not build upon prerequisite concepts before discussing with students "using one's voice to enact change." I find that the teacher did not seek approval before using these materials as part of her lesson, nor did she notify the building principal that she intended to use outside materials as part of this lesson. I have concluded that the lesson did not comply with Board Policy 2330 (Academic Freedom), which entitles teachers to academic freedom "subject to accepted standards of professional responsibility within the framework of district policies and administrative procedures."

Second, I find that the lesson plan, which included video depicting pro-Palestinian marches and protest signs regarding the Israel/Palestine conflict was not age-appropriate, nor did it guide discussion on that subject with objectivity or the need to recognize opposing viewpoints. The materials used as part of that lesson took a position on an ongoing international conflict with complex history and differing viewpoints, which would be challenging for seven- and eight-year-olds to fully comprehend, particularly in three short social studies lessons. As a result, I have concluded that use of these materials violated Board Policy 2331, which provides that when teaching controversial issues, teachers must guide discussions with thoroughness and objectivity and acquaint students with the need to recognize opposing viewpoints and the virtue of respect for conflicting opinions. The policy further provides that "[w]hen in doubt regarding appropriateness," the materials should be referred to the principal for approval. As discussed above, the materials were not part of the District's approved curriculum and they were not approved by the building principal, in violation of Board Policy 2331.

Finally, I find that the lesson plan, and particularly the video and art projected, also violated Board Policy 5015 (Diversity – Human Dignity), which assures that the District will provide a "positive, harmonious environment in which diversity is respected and encouraged." Incorporating a video and art project in a social studies lesson that encouraged students to voice support for Palestine without any further historical context or discussion of antisemitism does not align with the

District's commitment to "reflect and value the diversity of cultures and to allow for these differences in systems and processes."

The District recognizes that we are a diverse community, and our instructional programs must promote mutual understanding and respect. We endeavor to create a culture where all families and students feel safe, respected, and included in our community. When building administration learned of the lesson in December 2023, it took steps to address the situation directly with impacted families and implemented procedures to ensure similar situations do not recur. That said, given the investigation findings, the following additional steps will be taken:

1. Syre Elementary School will issue a statement to the families reaffirming its commitment to Policy 5015 and acknowledging that a lesson on the Palestine/Israel conflict was presented to an elementary class, which lacked balance and included content that made members of our community feel unwelcome. The statement will reaffirm the District's responsibility to the students and families of Syre Elementary School and ensuring that it is a welcoming and inclusive environment as contemplated by Policy 5015.
2. The District's Curriculum and Instructional Department will send out a memo to all teachers regarding Policy 2331 and reiterate the process for including materials and content in lessons that are not approved District curriculum.
3. Specific action will be taken at the building level to ensure that the second-grade curriculum at Syre Elementary School complies with Policy 2331 and Policy 5015 going forward.

I want to reiterate that the District takes complaints of this nature seriously, and we stand ready to review any further concerns and follow-up as merited.

Sincerely,



Susana Reyes, Ed.D.
Superintendent

cc: Max Patashnik, Director, Seattle Jewish Community Relations Council

Enclosures: Policy 5015
Policy 2330
Policy 2331
Policy and Procedure 4312 and 4312P