

Position Statement concerning the Curricula Equity Audit authorized by the Guilford Board of Education (BOE) for grades 5 thru 12 in Social Studies and English Language Arts in the Fall of 2020, conducted by Dr. Don Siler (Associate Professor of Education at the University of St. Joseph, Hartford, CT.), and presented to the BOE on January 31, 2022, as a 24-page report under the heading of "Report on School Culture and Pedagogy in Guilford School District".

In the Fall of 2020, Superintendent Paul Freeman proposed that a "curricula equity audit" for grades 5 thru 12 focusing on Social Studies (SS) and English Language Arts (ELA) be conducted. According to Dr. Freeman, the purpose of the audit was to "identify unintentional areas of bias within those two subjects, and make sure they stand up to approaches the district preaches. We want to look at those curricula, and make sure that we are not inadvertently presenting a single narrative or a single story when we look at complicated topics like history and literature. A lot of this work focuses on text selections for courses, including making sure there are diverse materials from myriad authors, and they encourage critical thinking."(1) To this end, Dr. Siler was contracted to guide our "teachers in Guilford (to) look at their curriculum to determine how well their materials and teaching methods did or did not reflect a diverse spectrum of experiences."(2) Teachers were asked to determine the extent to which their Social Studies and English Language Arts curricula were, or were not, culturally responsive. Specifically, they were asked to fill out a Culturally Responsive Curriculum Scorecard within the context of a Culturally Responsive and Sustaining Education Framework developed by New York University's Steinhardt School of Education, to numerically quantify the diversity of characters, authors, and social justice themes in their curriculum.

Given the above, we expected a very specific report calling for numerical diversity and racial adjustments for both the Social Studies and English Language Arts curriculum including "learning goals and standards; units and lessons that lay out what teachers teach each day and week; assignments, activities and projects given to students; and books, materials, videos, presentations, and readings used in the class."(3) The report Dr. Siler produced instead, was an intentionally vague report with eight [8] broad open-ended recommendations calling for clearer administrative support, policy manual revisions, teacher evaluation criteria revisions, minority teacher recruitment and retention, family outreach, student/parent/alumni panels, focus groups and continued curriculum and pedagogy review.(4) This amounts to an open checkbook for our School Superintendent and the Board of Education, to codify the Equity and Social Justice Agenda without scrutiny, discussion or public input.

We must remind the Board of Education, and indeed the entire Guilford Public School Community, that you are required by statute to ensure that students are not indoctrinated with a single perspective or ideology per the following:

- "The Connecticut State BOE Position Statement on Comprehensive Social Studies Education for All Students K-12 and Beyond" says that the responsibilities of High School (HS) grades are to "Provide all high school students with a wide variety of choice when selecting social studies electives in the social studies disciplines (and to) expose students to a variety of cultures, ideologies and philosophies that may be different from their own". It goes on to say that the

responsibilities of teachers are to “assess student learning from multiple perspectives with multiple points of data.”(5)

- Connecticut Code of Professional Responsibility for Teachers. Section 10-145d-400a, subsection (B) states: “The professional teacher, in full recognition of his or her obligation to the student, shall: Engage students in the pursuit of truth, knowledge and wisdom, and provide access to all points of view without deliberate distortion of subject matter.”(6)
- Connecticut Code of Professional Responsibility for Administrators. Section 10-145d-400a, subsection (b) (3) states: “Promote in students’ pursuit of truth, knowledge and wisdom, and provide access to all points of view without deliberate distortion of subject matter.”(7)
- The Town of Guilford Code of Ethics Section 31-1 states that “the purpose of the code is to establish ethical standards of conduct for (town officials) that will ensure that the affairs, decisions, and actions of the Town be conducted without favoritism or conflict of interest, consistent with the highest ethical standards.”(8)
- In the Guilford BOE Policy Manual section 6334(a) entitled “Selection of Educational Materials”, it says “The Guilford BOE ... recognizes the students right to free access to many different types of materials ... Books and other materials shall be chosen for values of interest and enlightenment of all students in the community. A book shall not be excluded because of race, nationality, or the political or religious views of the writer or its style and language. Every effort will be made to provide material that presents all points of view concerning the problems and issues of the times--international, national, and local.”(9)
- In the Guilford BOE Policy Manual section 6238 entitled “Controversial Issues”, it says “as a basic educational competency, students should develop abilities to deal with controversial issues ... Students can become better informed individuals through examining evidence, facts, and differing viewpoints ... Perpetuation of the fundamental principles of American Society requires opportunities for students to read, to gather information, to speak, to hear alternative viewpoints and to reach honest judgements according to individual abilities ... (Teachers) must reinforce students’ rights to present and support personal conclusions with those who have opposing points of view ... Although teachers have the right to express personal viewpoints and opinions, they do not have the right to indoctrinate students with their personal views.”(10)
- Finally, from section 3334(a) of the BOE policy manual, “The Board will make the final decision on textbook adoption.”(9)

With these laws and policies in mind, No Left Turn in Education - Guilford wants to make it perfectly clear that whatever policy changes, contract changes, recruitment decisions, or numerical curriculum race recommendations are made as a result of Dr. Siler’s vague and limited report, they must comply with these statutes and regulations. Any curricular adjustments made as a result of Dr. Siler’s report must include an equal representation of Black and White scholars whose views are diametrically opposed to what has been characterized as Culturally Responsive Education (CRE) and Social Emotional Learning (SEL), both of which represent unmistakably one-sided ideological perspectives. These conservative scholars reject the unfounded charges of systemic racism and institutional racism. They believe in Dr. Martin Luther King’s dream of a color-blind society and school system as opposed to a race conscious society and school system. We would be pleased to provide a representative list of conservative scholars whose work addresses these complex issues in depth and that will balance any current and future recommendations resulting from this curricular audit.

We also take issue with the integrity of Dr. Siler’s analysis which avoids any consideration of the harmful psychologically and emotionally charged atmosphere that now prevails in the Guilford Public Schools

due to the politicization of instruction, the advancement of a racially charged ideology, the resultant bullying (both psychological and physical) by teachers and students, and the failure of the Guilford Public School System to address the negative manifestations of this atmosphere. This constitutes a gross misuse of our tax dollars in pursuit of a one-sided political agenda. In effect, Dr. Siler's report provides a thinly veiled "academic" cover for the Superintendent's radical and anti-American "equity and social justice initiatives" which are being foisted on our teachers, students, and on our entire Guilford school community. Where citizens should expect, and indeed demand, a report that critically examines the current state of education in Guilford from an unbiased perspective, we have been presented with a report that simply tells the Superintendent what he wants to hear, and which advances his preconceived political agenda.

On the Guilford Public School website, there is a document entitled "Questions and Answers about Equity and Social Justice Work in the Guilford Public Schools". One of the questions posed in this document is "Why was (the book) "How to be an Anti-Racist" provided to teachers in the district, and why wasn't a similar text with an opposing position distributed? The answer given was that "the book provided a different perspective to the idea that being "color blind" or that not being overtly racist oneself was a reasonable approach to ending systemic racism in America ... It was not necessary to provide a counter text that argued that presenting material in the traditional way and that not being overtly racist to or with our students was an alternate approach because in Guilford we are already good at both of those approaches. We are good at not being racist; this book asked us to think about our own practice and to ask ourselves if that was enough."(11) This nonsensical and convoluted rationalization for not balancing the purchase of this radical "anti-racist" text (as well as other taxpayer funded purchases of texts by Culturally Responsive Education (CRE) advocates such as Debbie Irving, Robin DiAngelo, David Kirkland, Heather Mcghee, etc.), with the views of conservative, pro-America Black and White scholars whose views are 180 degrees opposite, is totally unacceptable.

Public education is not an experiment where a radical and racially divisive ideology may be imposed upon intellectually defenseless students by those in authority with a political agenda. If the separation of church and state is the law of the land (Everson v. Board of Education), the same principles enunciated in that decision should apply equally to the promotion of secular ideologies in schools, particularly those of a racially charged nature that have the potential to foment, or exacerbate, racial division. We expect Guilford Public Schools to provide the curricular balance it is legally and ethically obligated to provide.

Respectfully,

No Left Turn in Education-Guilford

www.noleftturnguilford.org

Bibliography

- 1) www.ctinsider.com "What is Guilford's controversial school social justice and equity plan?"
- 2) www.ctexaminer.com "Nothing radical about curriculum or reforms, says Guilford Superintendent"
- 3) Curriculum Scorecard developed by New York University's Steinhardt School of Education
- 4) Power Point Presentation by Dr. Siler on his "Report on School Culture and Pedagogy In Guilford Public Schools" January 2022

- 5) Connecticut State Board of Education, "Position Statement on Comprehensive Social Studies Education K-12 and Beyond"
- 6) Connecticut Code of Professional Responsibility for Teachers. Section 10-145d-400a, subsection (b) (1) (C)
- 7) Connecticut Code of Professional Responsibility for Administrators. Section 10-145d-400a, subsection (b) (3)
- 8) Guilford Code of Ethics section 31-1
- 9) Guilford Board of Education Policy Manual section 6334(a) "Selection of Educational materials"
- 10) Guilford board of Education Policy Manual section 6238 "Controversial Issues"
- 11) GPS website "Questions and Answers about Equity and Social Justice Work in the Guilford Public Schools"