

To: Waukee Community School District Board Members

Date: August 5, 2021

Re: Equity Standards

Dear Board Members:

I am writing to you again about the Waukee Equity Standards. To those of you who took the time to respond to my first letter of July 29th, thank you. At first, I was discouraged by the undertone of defeat in your emails – as if “it’s too late.” However, all school boards have the ability to rescind or amend something previously adopted. Every human on this earth has – at one time – made a decision with good intention only to discover down the road that decision is causing more harm than good. So, it’s never too late to correct a mistake, right a wrong or simply do better. I pray that each of you will have the heart and open mind to listen to the parents who elected you, and entrusted their children’s well-being to you. I pray you find the courage to stand up to the societal pressures to conform and truly do what’s best for Waukee students. Here’s why...

1. The number one reason to rescind the Equity Standards is their controversial origin. News is spreading quickly that these Standards were copied word-for-word from the Southern Poverty Law Center, a group well-known for creating chaos, inciting violence and advocating cancel culture. Waukee will never be able to wash or water these Standards down enough to remove the stain of the SPLC. Parents in our district will forever question why the Board allowed “critical race theory” into our schools if those Standards are not rescinded. How will the Board convince parent otherwise? Especially since there are so many exceptional, non-controversial examples of schools that are teaching “diversity without division.” Why on earth did WCSD choose the SPLC as our school’s model? Even little kids know the basic rule of “don’t fight fire with fire” (i.e., don’t fight racism with racism, bias with bias, etc.). It only makes things worse – far worse, but that is modus operandi for the SPLC.
2. Many parents are curious what caused our school district to become so fixated on identity politics over academics in the first place? What problems were the Board really trying to solve last fall when the Standards were passed? If the Board truly wants the best for ALL students, research shows that focusing on academic excellence is the best predictor of outcomes and leaves little room for unhealthy social and political discourse to take hold. Isn’t the fact that Waukee High School doesn’t even make the top 20 percent of best high schools in the US what we should be discussing? In 2021, Waukee High School ranked #4014 out of 17,800 in terms of college readiness, reading and math proficiency, underserved student performance, college curriculum breadth and graduation rates. How much time and money has the district spent on consultants and

lawyers to work on the Equity Standards, who are now busy trying to find loopholes to make them legal? Is it really in our students' best interest to direct time, resources and attention away from basic learning and academic excellence?

3. Another huge concern is the paradox that exists between equity and diversity. Please explain how these two Standards can co-exist? Diversity is what makes each student unique and special. Equity, in contrast, requires everyone to be the same / have the same. To achieve equity in our schools, diversity would have to be eliminated, which is both biologically and psychologically impossible. Diversity exists naturally and inherently – we are all different, not just on the outside...on the inside too. Those diversities should be celebrated – not grouped and labeled in enigmatic attempts to “level the playing field.” Waukee’s Equity Standards have created an irreconcilable conflict between diversity and equity that will inevitably result in more bias and discriminatory practices because it divides our kids, rather than unites them.
4. To dive a bit deeper on diversity, every leader and business owner will tell you that diversity programs FAIL miserably when they focus solely on physical attributes, like race and gender. Real diversity at Waukee will only begin when teachers and administrators acknowledge that students bring so much more to the table than their skin color or pronouns. Diversity happens at Waukee when we instill a spirit of acceptance and appreciation – when we teach our children to treasure themselves and their peers for who they are and what they can do. The real benefit of diversity however – the transformative change it ignites – happens with inclusion, which means inviting every unique voice to the conversation. It means saying *“I hear you and value your perspective even if I don’t agree with you.”* Inclusion is uniting around shared passions and similarities, not grouping kids based on physiological differences. Inclusion does not require students to “fit in” – it encourages them to stand out. It makes them feel valued for what’s in their heart and mind, not the color of their skin.
5. Equity is empirically unachievable because it’s both unnatural and unconstitutional. To prove its unnatural, consider the analogy “the same boiling water that softens the potato hardens the egg.” Circumstances do matter. What YOU want and how hard YOU are willing to work matters. There is no evidence that supports the ideology that negative outcomes are proof of systematic oppression within a system, nor are the two even closely correlated by research. You cannot measure outcomes without factoring in individual decisions and effort. You do realize that some proponents of equity in schools are determined to eliminate the traditional family? Why would they do that? Because traditional two-parent families often read bedtime stories to their children and reading books at a young age creates an unfair advantage for children in non-traditional settings. So, the solution is abolishing the family!?!? I’m pretty confident no one on our Board subscribes to this extreme view of the equity movement, but as I asked in my previous letter...where do we draw the line and who draws it? From a constitutional perspective, every human being is entitled to equal treatment under the law, equal access to resources and opportunities, but nowhere is equity mentioned, let alone

guaranteed. Why? Because it does not exist. It's not real. Teaching students to expect equity in their lives does not equip them to succeed or find happiness. You cannot be happy if you're always seeking equity - comparing yourself and your circumstances to someone else. Comparing limits growth and creates resentment. Comparing makes kids feel unworthy and ungrateful –looking for someone or something to blame. Equality, on the other hand, teaches kids the importance of setting goals and working hard. It fosters self-reflection, self-reliance and personal accountability. Equality honors each student as an individual, with just the right support and the freedom to pursue what's in their heart – not what society or labels dictate. Parents do not want WCSD subjecting students to this trendy, unorthodox social experiment called equity.

6. Dividing Waukee students into identity groups and labeling them as such will have harmful, long-term impacts. As the parent of a Waukee middle-school student who still has open wounds from his experience being put into an identity group, I will vehemently challenge this practice at WCSD. A once energetic, intellectually challenging student is now too afraid to speak his mind for fear of being humiliated and ostracized. He has been conditioned to believe dissenting opinions are not welcome at Waukee – and now with these Standards, not even allowed. What if he carries this baggage and fear into high school? What if this mindset prevents him from feeling capable and confident as an adult? What if he never again feels worthy for simply being himself? Who is going to take responsibility for this? Surely, the Board recognizes that “identity grouping” steals individual voices, it robs freedom of choice and forces kids into conformity. Wouldn't it be good – with so much at stake – to pause and ask Waukee students how they *really* feel versus making sweeping assumptions that all students are either “oppressors” or “victims of the oppressors”? A simple, anonymous survey of Waukee students and teachers will likely reveal that 70% or more feel no sense of belonging at school, therefore, they do not feel safe. This is NOT a result of being oppressed – it's because their religious, social and/or political views are not accepted by the people in power at Waukee. While equity efforts may benefit a handful of students in the short term, it will dismantle our entire ecosystem over time because it cannot sustain itself naturally or without force. Please take action to prevent this from ever happening to another Waukee student.
7. Teaching students they can - and should - eliminate all forms of bias is a utopian idea. Not only is it impossible, it could be harmful. Yet Waukee's Equity Standards are overflowing with bias – if you don't see it or believe it, I'm happy to sit down with you and walk you through it, line by line. Bias is a naturally-occurring human behavior that cannot be wiped from our DNA simply because we say so. In some cases, bias is an important defense mechanism that alerts us to potentially dangerous situations. Teaching students that bias *in any form* is hateful and shameful is wrong and hypocritical. If you have children of your own, I bet you raised them to exercise certain biases in order to keep them safe – remember “stranger danger”? How – specifically - did you teach them to identify a stranger? You did this by tapping into their natural instincts – you taught them to assess people and situations based on a set of values,

beliefs and – yes – some level of bias. Waukee only needs to address bias when it leads to discriminatory practices or behavior – which means treating someone differently, denying access to services or opportunities for no other reason than pure bias itself.

Let me end this letter by thanking you again for your valuable time, and please do not feel obligated to respond. I appreciate how busy you are, and I have no grand illusion that one more letter from me will be enough to tip the scales – let alone inspire the whole Board to reverse course completely. I just want to give you more food for thought prior to Monday’s meeting. A lot of lives are impacted by your leadership in this moment, and I understand that’s a heavy burden to bear. Abraham Lincoln once stated, “The philosophy of the schoolroom in one generation is the philosophy of society in the next.” Knowing that, we should hold firm on best practices and curricula that are proven to work, such as:

- Making every student feel special and chosen (nothing softens the heart faster than the feeling of belonging – aka diversity).
- Making every student feel valued and heard (inclusion)
- Setting high standards for academic learning and performance based on each child’s unique talents, skills and abilities (action)
- Dealing with bad actors – no matter who they are – based on Waukee’s published handbooks and codes of conduct (justice)

By choosing our students over politics and excellence over equity, Waukee Schools - along with the entire community - can come together, grow together and thrive. On August 9<sup>th</sup>, please show our kids what humble, servant leadership is all about by acknowledging that we can do better and taking the necessary actions to make it happen. Remind everyone how blessed we all are to be raising our families in a community like Waukee, Iowa. Do this knowing you have an enormous amount of support from your community to rid our schools of this divisive policy and replace it with lasting, positive change. We are committed and ready to stand should-to-shoulder with the Waukee Board in unrelenting opposition to these radical Equity Standards in our schools. I’m confident you’ll see that support at the Board Meeting on Monday night.

With great respect,

Tami Rubino

CC: Dr. Brad Buck, Superintendent