

From : "Jennifer Covington"
To : [REDACTED]
Cc : [REDACTED], "Glo Merrill", "Kami Anderson", "Belinda Johnson", "Elizabeth Payne", "Jaren Cooper", [REDACTED], "Buck, Sarah", "Jennifer King", "Kaufman,Earl", [REDACTED], "Scott Wihongi", [REDACTED], "Darren Dean", [REDACTED], "wanderson@murrayschools.org", [REDACTED], "mball@murrayschools.org", [REDACTED], "journside@murrayschools.org", [REDACTED], "rteo@murrayschools.org", [REDACTED], "Bouwman, Jim", [REDACTED], "nduolata@murrayschools.org", "Heather Nicholas", "Kay Oborn", "Vanessa Jobe"
Subject : Re: Murray School District Equity Council
[REDACTED]

Below are the answers to your questions.

1. Why were parents not informed of or invited to be on the Equity Council?

The Equity Council was formed by MCSD educators in mid-2019 to address and review policies and practices that ensure our educators feel safe in our school system. When George Floyd was killed a year later, tensions were elevated and the Equity Council broadened their focus to that of an advisory role to also ensure all students feel safe and welcome in our schools. The council has only met a half-dozen times since its inception and is still very new and evolving as a fixture at the district. There has never been any intent not to have parents as part of the council. The council just never made it to the point where we could actively engage employees and parents in equity work to benefit the district. We have shared information on our website and social media about the Equity Committee in the past year. We have pushed pause on the Council at this time so that its mission, vision, and participants are better defined, inclusive, and representative.

2. How and why did the Equity Council have power to correct district memos and Utah law?

The first memo was sent to employees to remind them of the First Amendment and Political Speech. The second memo sought to clarify the first memo by specifically attempting to identify political speech. After this memo was sent, concern was immediately expressed to the district by many employees that some of the examples of political speech that were outlined were viewed by others as human rights. This memo also, unfortunately, served to disenfranchise marginalized employee groups within the district. The district determined it was prudent to retract this second memo at the time and work on more clarification for employees. At this point in time, the Equity Council became involved in helping craft a memo that would recognize and support all employees and students. This final memo was worked on in collaboration with district administration and was reviewed by the school board before being sent. We regret that assumptions about the Council's role and responsibility at the district have been misunderstood. This is why we have pushed pause on the Council at this time so that its mission, vision, and participants are better defined, inclusive, and representative.

3. Why didn't the district invite parents to view the Equity Council's presentation in the Utah Pride conference?

Representatives from Murray City School District were invited to present information about the work of the Equity Council at the Utah Pride Conference. Educators from the Murray City School District have been invited to share and participate at a wide range of educational conferences over the years. The district has not made it a practice to invite parents to participate in conferences geared for educators.

4. Why were Horizon parents given conflicting accounts of how Call Me Max appeared in the classroom?

Unfortunately, there was a lot of confusion in the days and weeks that followed the incident at Horizon Elementary School. That means different people (both in the district and outside the district) were told different things and that is something we as a district regret and will work to improve as we train our teachers and administrators districtwide. The administration of Horizon Elementary will be sending a letter to all third grade parents with further clarification. Parents are also encouraged to contact Horizon Principal Whitney Anderson to discuss concerns they have.

5. If the Call Me Max incident is still under investigation, why is the rest of the district receiving a conclusive answer while Horizon parents are not?

The incident surrounding the book Call Me Max is not still under investigation. The following information has been provided to parents who have inquired. This information has also been shared with all school principals and our school board. The 'personnel' matter referenced in this message is in regards to the district working with the administration of Horizon Elementary to ensure complete transparency when communicating with parents.

Information Sent in Email on February 5, 2021 in response to email from Greg Marchant:

The book "Call Me Max" was an isolated incident in one 3rd grade classroom at Horizon Elementary School. It has not been used in any other schools or classrooms. It was not approved by the Murray City School District Board of Education. A Horizon student brought the book in and asked if the teacher would read the book to the class. The teacher read the book to the class and answered the question you mentioned brought up by the students in the class about growing a beard. The administration at Horizon Elementary was not aware of this book being read until it was brought to their attention by parents. The communication that followed with parents was unfortunate in that several different messages were sent with conflicting information. We understand and appreciate that this has caused concerns of trust with parents. This is a personnel matter that we as a district have addressed with the administration at Horizon Elementary to ensure it does not happen in the future. We have also spoken with all of our administrators so they are aware of what occurred.

6. Will Horizon parents be given factual resolution on which story is true out of what the teacher and administrators told us?

The information we have shared as a district with you has been factual. We acknowledge that things were not handled as well as they could or should have been. The administration of Horizon Elementary will be sending a letter to all third grade parents with the factual information. Parents are also encouraged to contact Horizon Principal Whitney Anderson to discuss concerns they have.

7. If Call Me Max is not a district or school book, why was it seen in MCSD elementary trainings in Summer 2020?

Educators are given all kinds of training so we would need to know specifically which training this is in reference to. Please have the employees who have shared this with you contact Superintendent Covington so that we can further look into what took place and the context of the training.

8. How do parents access the "Additional Resources" list?

If this question is in reference to additional resources lists at Horizon Elementary, the school administration will address that in their forthcoming letter. We are unaware of any other school having an additional resource list. Exhaustive lists of teacher resources used in a classroom are not commonly posted publicly. However, we are happy to provide resource lists and other content upon request. We would ask that you reach out to your school principal to facilitate this.

9. Where will Book Bundles books be moved if they don't remain in the program?

We have pushed pause on the Book Bundle program at the moment to assess protocols and policies around it. We need more time to evaluate the processes and how to best communicate with parents. It is untenable for us to answer this question until that work has been completed.

10. Will parents be made aware of all books of similar content and topics being brought into our schools, regardless of destination?

As we have pushed pause on the Book Bundle program, we recognize we need to review and evaluate our book selection and approval process. We also need to understand the best manner in which to communicate this information to parents to avoid the recent confusion. As we work through these considerations and reach conclusions we will inform parents.

Jennifer Covington - Superintendent
Murray City School District
5102 S. Commerce Drive

----- Forwarded message -----

From: [REDACTED]
Date: Tue, Feb 9, 2021 at 1:28 AM
Subject: Re: Murray School District Equity Council
To: Jennifer Covington <jcovington@murrayschools.org>, [REDACTED]
Cc: Glo Merrill <gmerrill@murrayschools.org>, Kami Anderson <kanderson@murrayschools.org>, Belinda Johnson <bjohnson@murrayschools.org>, Elizabeth Payne <epayne@murrayschools.org>, Jaren Cooper <jcooper@murrayschools.org>, [REDACTED] Buck, Sarah <sbuck@murrayschools.org>, Jennifer King <jking@murrayschools.org>, Kaufman, Earl <ekaufman@murrayschools.org>, [REDACTED] Scott Wihongi <swihongi@murrayschools.org>, [REDACTED] Baren Dean <ddean@murrayschools.org>, [REDACTED] mball@murrayschools.org <mball@murrayschools.org>, [REDACTED] wanderson@murrayschools.org <wanderson@murrayschools.org>, [REDACTED] jburnside@murrayschools.org <jburnside@murrayschools.org>, [REDACTED] rteo@murrayschools.org <rteo@murrayschools.org>, [REDACTED] Bouwman, Jim <jbouwman@murrayschools.org>, [REDACTED] jaired@murrayschools.org <jaired@murrayschools.org>, [REDACTED] hdolata@murrayschools.org <hdolata@murrayschools.org>

Hello Ms. Covington-

Thank you for your reply and for the work being done surrounding these issues. As a Horizon parent who has more information about the Call Me Max incident, and having spoken with several other Horizon parents about it (as well as other community members and parents from other elementary schools), I am replying to your message to Greg and the others. (I hope I got everyone who was on the first message - I just hit "Reply All.") Greg did respond to some of these issues already, but I may repeat some of what he's addressed since these questions and concerns are coming from multiple sources.

We're glad things are being investigated, but many parents don't feel satisfied with the answers (or lack of answers) we have received so far. We still don't understand why the Equity Council has power to correct district memos which state Utah law. The corrected memo came out from MCSD in November 2020 (nearly 3 months ago), so we can reasonably assume that as a district you would already know why the Equity Council was given that power at that time. We would like to understand how and why that happened. Additionally, parents and other community members have received no explanation as to why we weren't alerted of or invited to be part of the Equity Council from the beginning of its formation. We've received no explanation for why MCSD presented in the Utah Pride Center conference, which was advertised as being for all Utah educators, students, and caregivers, but no MCSD parents were informed by the district of that beforehand so that we could take part in viewing it. We would all appreciate direct answers to these questions.

We have heard the information from PTA meetings and the explanations principals were told to give parents about Call Me Max. According to them, the book was brought in by a student, and the teacher mistakenly read it to the whole class. Many parents do not believe this story, which is understandable considering that for 2 weeks they were told by the Horizon teacher and administrators that the book was part of the intended 3rd grade equity and Second Steps curriculum. We feel MCSD needs to explain why conflicting accounts were given to parents. We have been told the incident is currently under investigation and is now a "personnel issue," so that's why we can't have answers. But at the same time, administrators are conclusively telling all other district members that the book was brought in by a student and mistakenly read by the teacher, as if that is the factual conclusion before the investigation has apparently even been finished. That does not make sense to us, and it does not feel honest. Additionally, we would like an explanation for why that same book was seen in MCSD teacher trainings for other elementary schools back in Summer 2020. Honestly, it seems incredibly coincidental that the student at Horizon just happened to have that same book. But regardless of which version is true about how the book appeared, parents were told two different stories by the teacher and administrators, so we feel we deserve factual resolution on what is the real truth.

Furthermore, in the interest of full transparency, parents would like access to the "Additional Resources" list for the Book Bundles. In January, some Horizon parents were told of this list and that possibly it was a list of resource books for school counselors, but no parent ever received it. Some parents were told that Call Me Max and other books of similar topics were found on this list, and it was taken from there to be read in the 3rd grade classroom. We are guessing these "Additional Resources" are probably in all the elementary schools, since at least one of the books found on that list was seen in teacher trainings last summer for other elementary schools.

We've been told by a parent who saw the full Book Bundles list that they have seen these books in their principal's office (in another elementary school besides Horizon). So we're suspecting this same book list was set to be used in all MCSD elementary schools soon. If any of these books are moved from the Book Bundles program, where will they go? Will they be allocated to elementary school libraries? Will they remain in our schools to be read independently by children? What about ALL books (not just Book Bundles or program-specific books) of similar topics and content? Will parents be made aware of these topics and books being brought into our children's schools, no matter the destination (library, counselor's office, etc.)? As stated previously, these books may bring up sensitive discussions, and parents want to (and have the legal right to) be informed about these topics being addressed with their children in schools, no matter how that may happen. Parents of all backgrounds and of all opinions and viewpoints want to feel prepared to cover these discussions with their children when they come home from school. We are all better prepared when we have complete transparency.

We are grateful for the district's help in working through these issues. We're glad the Equity Council and any corresponding programs, including the Book Bundles, will move forward with more transparency and more parent input from now on. We hope future parent meetings will help everyone to get more of their questions answered and will help ensure inclusivity for all. We feel it is important for our children to learn about and be kind and inclusive to all, and because those are such important issues and topics, as parents we want to be fully included in them. We want ALL students and employees to feel welcomed, loved, and safe in MCSD. We hope all members of the district can have a voice in how to best implement these programs and practices for everyone.

In summary, our questions are:

1. Why were parents not informed of or invited to be on the Equity Council?
2. How and why did the Equity Council have power to correct district memos and Utah law?
3. Why didn't the district invite parents to view the Equity Council's presentation in the Utah Pride conference?
4. Why were Horizon parents given conflicting accounts of how Call Me Max appeared in the classroom?
5. If the Call Me Max incident is still under investigation, why is the rest of the district receiving a conclusive answer while Horizon parents are not?
6. Will Horizon parents be given factual resolution on which story is true out of what the teacher and administrators told us?
7. If Call Me Max is not a district or school book, why was it seen in MCSD elementary trainings in Summer 2020?
8. How do parents access the "Additional Resources" list?
9. Where will Book Bundles books be moved if they don't remain in the program?
10. Will parents be made aware of all books of similar content and topics being brought into our schools, regardless of destination?

We look forward to receiving answers to these questions soon.

Thanks for all your help,

[REDACTED] and other MCSD Concerned Parents

Ms. Covington -

Thank you for the reply. I am glad that the materials will be re-evaluated, hopefully parents will be included in that conversation and that our input will be considered when deciding which materials are "developmentally appropriate". As parents, we sincerely seek a safe, tolerant, inclusive and understanding environment for every child in the classroom and to build and maintain trust between parents and administration. Bottom line is that hopefully we all can agree on the necessity of working together from here on out as a partnership and with full disclosure and transparency. To be blunt, it feels like parental rights have been secretly undermined. Regarding the incident at Horizon, I have forwarded your reply to parents at Horizon who can respond directly to that. They are more familiar with the specific facts of the *Call Me Max* incident and can better speak to the conversations, emails, and conflicting information received from teacher, principal, Dr. Jobe, Dr. Dean, etc.

That said, I do have some ongoing concerns: You have expressed a commitment to be "open and transparent." However, you didn't respond to my request for a parent meeting - can you tell me if that is on the table? Moreover, the Equity Council's presentation has been blocked from viewing: https://www.youtube.com/watch?fbclid=IwAR13qj_9L3InJS0l_JpQ_FRLRnh-WdkR96Evpc0cV-0F2T-JLcWluayzNbw&v=P29NAz2RH-4&feature=youtu.be. This does not seem to be moving toward transparency? I did take notes and Dr. Jobe specifically said the books on the Equity Books Bundle had been approved by the School Board. Dr. Dean was part of that video presentation and he did not dispute her statement and has not replied to my emails. Parents were also told the Bundle had been approved and that the Book Bundles have been distributed to other schools in the District. In the interests of transparency, if this "personnel issue" is affecting our children and rights as parents, I think we deserve some additional explanation and clarification. In the interests of transparency, is Dr. Dean willing to explain why the Equity Council (that we did not know existed) was able to pressure him into apologizing for a memorandum that explained that pursuant to Utah law "a public-school classroom is reserved for its intended purpose of importing relevant instructions and is not an open forum for employees to engage in their own political speech" and instead approved "equity-based curriculum, conversations, dialogue, and displays" without any notice to parents of this change in philosophy and approach. Before the Equity Council resumes full operation, will we be fully informed about its purposes, goals, and objectives and how our students' curriculum will be affected by its "core beliefs". Will parental involvement be permitted or will participants continue to be hand-picked?

Even if the Board did not approve the books on the Equity Books Bundle List, in the interests of transparency, why were parents not provided with the full book list and why was it not posted on the school or district website? If it was a student who brought in *Call Me Max*, did that student also bring in *Julian is a Mermaid* and the written assignment that went along with it? *Julian is a Mermaid* touches on gender-fluidity and was not on the Equity Book Bundles list sent to parents.

As part of the Equity Council's presentation, Dr. Dean said that the Equity Council was a grassroots movement. It was such a grassroots movement, that none of us knew about it. There is a grassroots movement of parents who are very concerned about what has happened and making sure it gets fixed. I am aware of dozens of parents who are concerned. It is not just me - as I am sure you are becoming aware. We look forward to a more open dialogue and that as "we show due regard" for teachers and students "feelings, rights, cultures, and traditions," there can also be due regard for parents' rights.

Most appreciately [REDACTED]

On Fri, Feb 5, 2021 at 3:39 PM Jennifer Covington <jcovington@murrayschools.org> wrote:

[REDACTED] Thank you for the follow up questions. I am happy to address them in hopes of providing the clarity you are asking for. Please know that we do value parents and parental input and never want anything to feel like it is being done in secret.

The book "Call Me Max" was an isolated incident in one 3rd grade classroom at Horizon Elementary School. It has not been used in any other schools or classrooms. It was not approved by the Murray City School District Board of Education. A Horizon student brought the book in and asked if the teacher would read the book to the class. The teacher read the book to the class and answered the question you mentioned brought up by the students in the class about growing a beard. The administration at Horizon Elementary was not aware of this book being read until it was brought to their attention by parents. The communication that followed with parents was unfortunate in that several different messages were sent with conflicting information. We understand and appreciate that this has caused concerns of trust with parents. This is a personnel matter that we as a district have addressed with the administration at Horizon Elementary to ensure it does not happen in the future. We have also spoken with all of our administrators so they are aware of what occurred.

With regard to the equity book bundles, a presentation was made to the school board by Dr. Jobe in the fall that listed the books the school would be using throughout the year. The board did not review or approve these - it was simply part of a presentation that was made to the board. Horizon Elementary is the only school that has implemented these equity book bundles at this time. As mentioned in my last email, all equity book bundle books have been suspended while we work to put a process in place where these books will be reviewed by educators and approved by the School Community Council. We are committed to being fully transparent with this process and ensure our parents are fully informed.

The Equity Council was formed by educators, who were feeling unsafe as employees in our school system, as a place where we could look at policy to ensure equal employment opportunity for all. When Trayvon Martin was killed and tensions in our state and country rose, the equity committee broadened their focus to ensure all of our students felt safe and welcomed in our schools. Another individual did let me know that a parent had been told that the Equity Council did not want any more 'white-identifying' people on the council. Our Director of Human Services and Student Services serves on this council and was not aware of anyone being told this. I asked that parent who told me this to please have that individual, or any individual who was told that, to please contact me personally so I could hear their story and address it appropriately. At this time, all work with the equity council has been suspended while we work to ensure a solid direction and framework moving forward that will have many voices.

Our goals moving forward are to put policy and measures in place to ensure that we are open and transparent with books that are being read in the classroom and the mission, purpose and vision of Equity Council. We respect the rights and values of parents and do want to work together. As an education community, we want to show respect by acknowledging differences, looking for the good in everyone, and showing due regard for others' feelings, rights, cultures, and traditions. Our actions as educators and parents will demonstrate our belief that we are better when we are working together on behalf of every child.

Jennifer Covington - Superintendent
Murray City School District
5102 S. Commerce Drive
Murray, UT 84107
801.264.7400



On Thu, Feb 4, 2021 at 2:05 AM [REDACTED] wrote:

Dear Ms. Covington and Others:

Thank you for the replies, I appreciate your time and what appears to be your commitment to transparency going forward. I also appreciate that some of these issues are being discussed and re-evaluated. Although most of my questions weren't answered, that's understandable - there were a lot of them. Hopefully at some point they will be. I hate taking your time on this issue and, to be honest, I hate taking so much of my own time on it. But something is happening here in Murray that just doesn't seem right - and is causing many of us deep concern.

Transparency and parental involvement should be the biggest learning lesson. We all want our kids to be safe and for teachers and parents to have resources. But regardless of any parent's opinion on the propriety of teaching some of these things in school, I would think all parents can agree that we deserve to be advised of what

addressed before it happens.

Since my last email to you, I have been receiving information that has left me quite bewildered and confused. Many other parents seem to feel the same way. Conflicting information has been coming from Dr. Jobe and other school personnel regarding how Julian is a Mermaid and Call Me Max ended up being read to a 3rd grade class at Horizon without parental consent. One parent was told that the book was brought by a student or parent and read by the teacher to the class. Dr. Jobe said that "Call Me Max" was only read to help a student feel supported for a specific incident and she sent a parent an Equity book list that did not include Call Me Max or Julian is a Mermaid. Dr. Jobe also apparently said that she didn't believe LGBTQ+ issues should be discussed until 6th grade.

Another parent was told that those books were part of the curriculum and were part of the school and district's focus on equity work and Second Steps program. The 3rd grade teacher told another parent that reading these books were part of the school and district's focus on equity and antiracist work and she included copies of the school district's memoranda as proof that the materials were approved (inferring that advance notice to parents was not required). She said that the books were part of their equity lessons for the week. Dr. Jobe told another parent that the lessons are wonderful and developmentally appropriate and included a list of the equity books for the year, which DID include both Julian is a Mermaid and Call Me Max. In addition, Dr. Jobe apparently told at least one parent that the equity book bundles had been approved by the Murray School Board, but a member of the board has said that was not true. So parents are being told two different things by Dr. Jobe and others. Either it was an isolated incident or it was part of an approved plan. Either the books were approved by the Board or they weren't. Either the books are developmentally appropriate or should wait until 6th grade. It can't be both. So, Number One, there seems to be a problem with getting true and accurate information, and Number Two, parents were never given notice and never provided consent. Utah Code Section 53E-9-203 requires parental consent before topics involving "sexual behavior, orientation or attitudes" are discussed. This was acknowledged by the First Memorandum sent to District personnel, in August, before the Equity Council (as claimed in their video at the Utah Pride conference) successfully persuaded the District to send a revised Memorandum with an apology that substitutes "Equity" in place of Utah Law.

What I have been told is that these two books were part of the Equity Book Bundles program administered by Dr. Jobe. Parents became concerned after their children came home and mentioned the teacher had talked to them about how science has made it possible for women who want to become men to grow a beard after going through puberty. If I understand correctly, certain parents received a list from Dr. Jobe, after the fact, informing them that "Call Me Max" was part of the curriculum and book list for the 3rd grade equity book bundles program. [See attachments from Dr. Jobe](#). Apparently, she provided the parents with a list of monthly topics and the October 2020 topic was Sexuality and Gender, so the books and topics appear to have been intentionally part of the 3rd grade curriculum from the outset of the school year, without parents' knowledge or consent. Moreover, Call Me Max was apparently incorporated into teacher trainings last summer.

Prior to Call Me Max, the 3rd Graders read and did an assignment on Julian is a Mermaid. The author Jessica Love says about this book that "As a genderfluid person, I didn't see this as a transgender book, but more about the freedom of gender expression," and originally it was about how Julian wanted to be a drag queen, but the author changed it to a mermaid because "there's something magical about how mermaids have no genitalia." Remember, this is for 3rd grade. The students then did an assignment where the worksheet says that Julian sees himself as a mermaid in the story, and asks them to draw a picture in a mirror of what they would like to become. Could it be that Julian is a Mermaid was preparing them for Call Me Max? Here is a link to Call Me Max where you can see that a child is looking in a mirror (like the assignment in Julian is a Mermaid) and sees herself as a boy who is transgender. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jcrPnaCbKrY>. The book goes on to state that when a baby is born and parents call the baby a boy or girl, if the baby could talk the baby might say "NO I'M NOT" because the parents made a mistake. So without parents' consent or knowledge, the children are being taught at school that their parents may have made a mistake in calling them a boy or a girl. Again this is in 3rd grade.

So can you please clear this up? Were the books and Equity Bundles approved by the School District, only approved by Dr. Jobe, or implemented by the Equity Council? If the Equity Council, who formed the Equity Council and where does it derive its authority? I was sent a document with the Mission of the Equity Council. It is attached. One of the core beliefs is centering those impacted by marginalization in the curriculum. According to the document, marginalized include people of color, disabled, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer people, immigrants, etc. When I think of centering, it sounds like the curriculum and teaching will place these categories in the center, or the focus, or top priority. It also talks about an intersectional approach, which from the Utah Pride Center lectures we watched, means "unlearning all binaries" such as male and female. Based on Call Me Max and Dr. Jobe's involvement with the Equity Council, this centering and these teachings have been happening at least as early as 3rd grade. Nowhere in the document is there anything about seeking parental input, buy-in, or consent; instead, the "group norm" is to "call others out". Apparently, at least one parent has been told the Equity Council doesn't want any more "white-identifying" people on the council. Is that accurate?

I am not the only one seeking additional information. Many parents are concerned and many more than I realized. Can you please provide us with the real story on what has been happening and what the goals are going forward? I agree that those who may be "marginalized" may have unique challenges that need to be addressed in a sensitive manner. That is all the more reason to involve us in the process. At the same time, I am learning that according to the "Equity" agenda, Equity is not about "Equality". According to Ten Commitments for Equity-Literate Educators: "Equity is not about valuing every perspective. An equity view does not value heteronormativity," and "educational outcome disparities are the result of structural inequities and have nothing to do with students' grittiness, mindsets..." I fundamentally disagree with a philosophy that elevates victimhood and ignores individual choice and accountability.

Perhaps an in-person meeting with parents would be helpful - one that is calm and involves transparent discourse and explanations. The more transparency, the more understanding. Maybe then fewer bridges will be burned and more bridges can be built. We all want what is best for the kids, even if we see things from different perspectives. To find common ground we need to be able to trust that our rights as parents will be valued and respected. When things are hidden, it feels like we are somehow the enemy. We want to work together, PLEASE work with us and not in secret or behind our backs. You might ask, why do you care so much, your kids don't go to Horizon?? I watched the video from the Utah Pride Center conference and Dr. Jobe made it very clear that this is meant to be incorporated District-wide.

Thanks [REDACTED]

On Tue, Feb 2, 2021 at 4:45 PM Jennifer Covington <jcovington@murrayschools.org> wrote:
[REDACTED]

Thank you for your email. We value and appreciate your thoughts. We agree that it is important that students, employees and families in the Murray City School District are able to participate in a school system that values and respects each person. Transparency and communication are also essential to what we do and believe. We are committed to doing our best in both of these areas.

The Equity Council was started a little over a year ago with the mission of building a diverse, equitable, and inclusive district by providing all students, families, and employees with a community of care, respect, and belonging. At present, the council consists of educators, administrators, and parents. At this time, the Equity Council has been suspended while the district and School Board work to put measures in place to ensure the purpose of the council is clear, defined, and communicated to all parents and employees. You are correct that these are complicated issues with no easy answers and it is important that parents have a voice in the work that is being done as we work to support all students.

The Equity Book Bundles have also been placed on hold at this time while we work to put procedures in place to ensure transparency and communication. The district is working on an action plan where educators and then the School Community Council will review all equity materials. Parents will be fully informed of what is being used in the classroom and provided with additional information regarding the materials. Parents will also have the ability to opt their child out of any reading by simply notifying their teacher.

We want to be thoughtful and intentional as we work on both of these areas. All procedures and measures will be shared with our parents as we agree that transparency and communication are vital.

Thank you for your advocacy of not only your students but all students. As a district, we are committed to working to make sure parents are fully informed of what is happening in their child's classroom.

Jennifer Covington - Superintendent
Murray City School District
5102 S. Commerce Drive
Murray, UT 84107
801.264.7400

On Mon, Feb 1, 2021 at 4:50 PM [REDACTED] wrote:

To Members of the Board, Superintendent, and Chairs of Community Councils (at Viewmont, Riverview and Murray High):

My wife and I are parents of 4 students that each attend one of the above-referenced schools - and my wife is a former teacher who often substitute teaches at Viewmont Elementary at teacher's requests. She isn't involved in the drafting of this email and is seeing it for the first time along with you, though she was aware I would be sending it. Our children are good students and the Murray Schools have been a nice fit for our family. Our children are generally shy and sometimes have a hard time making new friends, but we try to help them through that as parents - and they have had good teachers. We would hope that all teachers and staff would look at them as individuals who need help, support, guidance, and skills-training - not because, or in spite of, their gender, sexual orientation, race, religion or any other category.

With that backdrop, I recently learned about the Murray School Equity Council that was apparently created some time ago. I don't believe parents have been told about this Council, have we? If we were, somehow I missed the memo. I watched two of many videos/lectures (that have now been taken down) from the Utah Pride Center's recent conference for Utah Educators. One video that was extremely concerning to me was the Keynote Speaker Dr. Kyl Myers. I also viewed the presentation by the Murray School District's Equity Council. As I said, the videos are no longer able to be viewed, but I did take some notes while watching the presentations. Based on those lectures, I would like to ask you some questions to find out more about the Equity Council, what their goals and objectives are, and how this will affect the children and our family.

1. In the Equity Council's video presentation a question was asked about how it has been received by the parents. The answer was basically that they need to do a better job getting the word out to the parents. I would agree with that. How do we find out about what the Equity Council is doing? Do they have open meetings? Are their agendas shared with the community councils? Are the community councils giving input? Can you please let me know the best way to obtain access to this information?
2. In the Equity Council's video presentation, they mentioned that one of their greatest "Successes" was that the council was able to get the District to rescind a Memorandum that went out to District personnel in August by issuing a revised Memorandum in November. I have now read all these memoranda (see attached) and the first one seemed to communicate that the School District would follow Utah law and could control political speech in the classroom. The last one apologizes for being "harmful to the community" and appears to put "Equity" as the overriding principle governing Educators. Was the council really the body that achieved this "Success"? How did they do it? Should parents have been informed? No one asked me whether the Memorandum was harmful - were other parents asked? A memorandum to personnel regarding what will be allowed in the classroom directly impacts all parents and children in the district. Should we draw any conclusions from the fact that the first memorandum was issued before the election and the last one was three weeks after the election?
3. I have been informed that a book called Call Me Max, dealing with transgenderism, was read in a 3rd grade class in our district without parental consent. When those parents objected, the teacher cited them to the 3rd memorandum that was apparently released due to the Equity Council's successful initiative. Is it true that parents do not need to be informed when subjects regarding sexual orientation, transgenderism, the Black Lives Matter organization, gender issues are taught to our children? We had to sign a consent form for our child to watch "Because of Winn Dixie", but if it is a book on transgenderism is subject matter for the 3rd grade classroom, no parental consent is required?
4. In the introduction to the keynote address at the Utah Pride Center's conference for Utah Educators, the speaker made the point that schools are not about "transferring knowledge," but should be about engaging in discussions that "bring about change." I would like to know what the Murray School District's view is with respect to that comment? Who agrees with that premise and who disagrees? Is Murray School District's primary objective to help our students engage in discussions that bring about change? If so, what change?
5. The Keynote Speaker made the point that she now teaches at a University where she doesn't have to deal with communications from parents. Does Murray School District value and appreciate and incorporate parental input? What is being done to be transparent about what our children are being taught? Does Murray District agree with me that there should be more transparency, not less? Do you agree that parents have a right to know what is being taught in the classroom regarding controversial subjects in society and how those issues are being presented? That we should focus more on educating our students to be productive, qualified, and skilled in the work force and being respectful citizens rather than on social engineering and political indoctrination? What is your stance?
6. The keynote speaker said that all students, parents and staff need to "unlearn all binaries" and to be retrained. In other words, no children should be looked at as male or female without the students first indicating what they want to be called. I assume this would also mean that if a student who is biologically a male says he is a female, he would be allowed to use the girls bathroom. Is this how the Equity Council and Murray School District view the world? If this is the direction we will go, will parental input be considered? An example she gave of improper gender bias was having a "Daddy Daughter Dance" or "Muffins with Mothers". We have had similar events in our children's schools, does the Equity Council aim to cancel these types of things?
7. Have you thought about whether the term "Equity" could really be a code word for opening the door to ignoring the Utah Constitution and the right of parents to have a say in their children's education? Are you in favor of the school system being revolutionized to incorporate political agendas and to replace basic and common sense teachings of mutual respect and courtesy with those political agendas? Are you in favor of using "Equity" to treat people differently based on certain "marginalized" categories with the goal of achieving equal outcomes rather than working toward providing equal opportunities? If yes to these questions, will you please let us know that in a transparent way? The Equity Council said something to the effect that one of their core beliefs is to center those most impacted by "marginalization" in the curriculum, policies, and practices. What does that mean?
8. The Equity Council mentioned some kind of an Equity Book bundle that is available or will become available. Do parents have access to this?
9. The Equity Council mentioned getting an equity director appointed at each school. Will we be informed before this happens? What is the criteria and what will they do? Will it be a paid position?
10. Jordan School District has Culture and Diversity Specialists who have begun doing training in classrooms. Will Murray School District have similar positions? Will parents be informed on what specifics are being taught?

Black Lives Matter and other people are trying to get a State School Board Member removed from the State Board of Education because she shared some of the lectures that were presented at the Utah Pride Center conference, including the two that I mention above, and because she is standing up for Utah families and the right of parents to know what their students are being taught. I'm attaching a copy of a message they sent to the Utah State School Board. To me it sounds anything but tolerant, anything but understanding, and anything but being willing to engage in a dialogue or conversation. Calling someone racist and homophobic because of differences of opinion does not sound like Equity to me, it kind of comes across more like bullying. Another group criticized her because she is advocating for the Golden Rule - doing unto others as we would have done unto us. To them, somehow that principle violates separation of church and state and is white supremacist.

I have not in the past been involved in Community Councils, but I can see that is a mistake because I had no idea that an Equity Council even existed, let alone that they are giving lectures on the changes that need to happen in our school system. Any information or answers you can provide to the questions raised in this email would be greatly appreciated and to each of us as parents going forward. My hope is that you will seek, consider, and appreciate the input of parents instead of only those groups who will scream, intimidate, threaten, and cancel.

Thanks [REDACTED]

From [REDACTED]
To : "Jennifer Covington"
Cc : [REDACTED], "Glo Merrill", "Kami Anderson", "Belinda Johnson", "Elizabeth Payne", "Jaren Cooper", [REDACTED],
"Buck, Sarah", "Jennifer King", "Kauffman, Earl", [REDACTED], "Scott Wihongi", [REDACTED], "Barren Dean",
[REDACTED], "w Anderson@murrayschools.org", "b Anderson@murrayschools.org", [REDACTED],
[REDACTED], "Bouwman, Jim"
[REDACTED], "jairee@murrayschools.org", "ndolata@murrayschools.org", "Heather Nicholas", "Kay Oborn", "Vanessa Jobe"
Subject: Re: Murray School District Equity Council

I am the one writing this email, but on behalf of many parents. We were advised of the Trib article this morning. I can't express how betrayed we feel. This is inexcusable and incredibly HARMFUL (ironic considering that was the reason you gave for rescinding the memorandum). The District did a one-sided, false, and self-preserving article with the Tribune WITHOUT ANY WARNING. The last thing I heard from Ms. Covington was that mistakes had been made, the District would acknowledge the mistakes and do better. We were told that our concerns would be considered and addressed - and you would work toward restoring trust. We were promised more transparency, we were promised parental input. We were promised parent meetings. For two days now, it has been radio silence.

Then you send your email below stating that you will handle the personnel issue, but only to ensure transparency in communications despite written email evidence that it was not only lack of transparency, they were FALSEHOODS. Next, a message goes out district-wide saying a committee will be formed to review materials, we aren't given any information about whether parents will have any input on that Committee.

Then you don't even give us any heads up that there will be an article in the paper and parents are given no voice in that article, just like they were given NO voice or even notice before Call Me Max was read in a 3rd Grade Classroom. You told YOUR side to protect YOURSELF. The article also hides and twists the facts to make the District look good and portrays and characterizes us as parents (and it's not just me, it's many of us) as racists and homophobes. Why? Utah law states that parents have the primary responsibility for the education of their children and requires that we have notice and consent before these types of things are taught. How you have handled this is NOT ok! Your expressed reason for rescinding Memorandum 1 was because some had communicated they didn't feel safe either because of the Trayvon Martin or George Floyd incidents (one email said the former and one the latter). Apparently you don't care whether we or our children feel SAFE or STRESSED. The fact is that you were willing to hang us out to dry to protect yourselves, while we were merely seeking answers, transparency and for our rights as parents to be protected.

There is nothing in the article explaining that for 2 weeks when parents asked why Call Me Max was read in the classroom without their consent, they were told that it was because the District and Equity Council had approved it via the Memoranda and did NOT tell the parents it was because a student had brought the book in. No mention of the fact that Call Me Max and the Equity Book Bundles had been delivered to other schools. No mention of the fact that no investigation was ever done despite parents having emails proving they were not being told the truth. No mention that Dr. Jobe sent an email, after the books had already been read and discussed, to parents specifically listing Julian is a Mermaid and Call Me Max as part of the Equity Book Bundle List. No mention that some parents were told that Julian is a Mermaid and Call Me Max were part of an Additional Resources list, but no parent ever saw that list. No mention of the District deciding, without parental consent or notice, to rescind a memorandum requiring staff to follow Utah law and provide consent and notice to parents before reading sensitive materials. In fact, at the Conference when someone asked if there had been any pushback, the answer was no (Dr. Jobe and Dr. Dean knew that was not true). No mention of the fact that Julian is a Mermaid was read in the classroom before Call Me Max (again without parental notice or consent) was introduced. No mention of the fact that Julian is a Mermaid was not on the Equity Book Bundles List either. Was Julian is a Mermaid also brought in by a student??? No mention that the students were given an assignment regarding Julian is a Mermaid by their teacher. No mention that the Julian is a Mermaid assignment served to prepare the students for Call Me Max by having the students draw a picture of what they want to be in a mirror and Call Me Max opens up with a transgender boy looking in the mirror. No mention of how coincidental it is that the student brought in the same book that Dr. Jobe said was on the Equity Book Bundles List. No mention that Call Me Max specifically tells 3rd Graders that their parents may have made a mistake when they called them a boy or a girl - and parents had no notice or ability to prepare for that type of discussion. No mention of parents' rights being completely undermined. Mr. Perry says in the article that the student's questions were about puberty. There is no mention that the students read the About the Author Section which led to the students asking how the author was able to grow a beard or the discussion that followed regarding adults being able to take medicine to make that happen. According to the article, the "district has removed the page on its website explaining the [equity books] program." When was it ever there?? Teachers and administrators have said it was never there.

Comments on the Trib article are ranting about how close-minded, intolerant, and homophobic any parent must be who raised any concerns. They are drawing these conclusions from the misinformation, half-truths, and falsehoods you provided to the Tribune. They have been intentionally misled and that is wrong. To be honest, this is total BS and there is no excuse or justification for it. How do people sleep at night when they are willing to do this to parents to protect themselves from criticism. We teach our kids to love everyone, to be tolerant of others viewpoints, to be kind and understanding. We are involved in their education. We try to serve in the community. All we wanted was some transparency, some straight answers, a partnership with teachers and the administration, and to protect our kids. Others with an adult, political agenda have secretly done things without notice to parents and then tell conflicting stories after the fact to parents and the media - and willingly pull the rug out from under us and put OUR SAFETY at risk.

I have tried to be calm and I have tried to be reasonable. I thought we were making progress. Not only are we not making progress, but I can't even process what is happening right now. I don't even know how trust can be repaired. I don't even know how we fix this. I am sure an apology won't be forthcoming and would be meaningless anyway. But something needs to be done and it better be thoughtful and it better be fair. It better have the interests of ALL kids at heart and not your reputations and not your jobs and not certain interest groups who make threats and call names and have a pipeline to the press and act as BULLIES.

I don't know what else there is to say or what else can be done. If you have an idea, send it our way.

On Tue, Feb 9, 2021 at 3:58 PM Jennifer Covington <jcovington@murrayschools.org> wrote:

Below are the answers to your questions.

1. Why were parents not informed of or invited to be on the Equity Council?

The Equity Council was formed by MCSD educators in mid-2019 to address and review policies and practices that ensure our educators feel safe in our school system. When George Floyd was killed a year later, tensions were elevated and the Equity Council broadened their focus to that of an advisory role to also ensure all students feel safe and welcome in our schools. The council has only met a half-dozen times since its inception and is still very new and evolving as a fixture at the district. There has never been any intent not to have parents as part of the council. The council just never made it to the point where we could actively engage employees and parents in equity work to benefit the district. We have shared information on our website and social media about the Equity Committee in the past year. We have pushed pause on the Council at this time so that its mission, vision, and participants are better defined, inclusive, and representative.

2. How and why did the Equity Council have power to correct district memos and Utah law?

political speech that were outlined were viewed by others as human rights. This memo also, unfortunately, served to disenfranchise marginalized employee groups within the district. The district determined it was prudent to retract this second memo at the time and work on more clarification for employees. At this point in time, the Equity Council became involved in helping craft a memo that would recognize and support all employees and students. This final memo was worked on in collaboration with district administration and was reviewed by the school board before being sent. We regret that assumptions about the Council's role and responsibility at the district have been misunderstood. This is why we have pushed pause on the Council at this time so that its mission, vision, and participants are better defined, inclusive, and representative.

3. Why didn't the district invite parents to view the Equity Council's presentation in the Utah Pride conference?

Representatives from Murray City School District were invited to present information about the work of the Equity Council at the Utah Pride Conference. Educators from the Murray City School District have been invited to share and participate at a wide range of educational conferences over the years. The district has not made it a practice to invite parents to participate in conferences geared for educators.

4. Why were Horizon parents given conflicting accounts of how Call Me Max appeared in the classroom?

Unfortunately, there was a lot of confusion in the days and weeks that followed the incident at Horizon Elementary School. That means different people (both in the district and outside the district) were told different things and that is something we as a district regret and will work to improve as we train our teachers and administrators districtwide. The administration of Horizon Elementary will be sending a letter to all third grade parents with further clarification. Parents are also encouraged to contact Horizon Principal Whitney Anderson to discuss concerns they have.

5. If the Call Me Max incident is still under investigation, why is the rest of the district receiving a conclusive answer while Horizon parents are not?

The incident surrounding the book Call Me Max is not still under investigation. The following information has been provided to parents who have inquired. This information has also been shared with all school principals and our school board. The 'personnel' matter referenced in this message is in regards to the district working with the administration of Horizon Elementary to ensure complete transparency when communicating with parents.

Information Sent in Email on February 5, 2021 in response to email from Greg Marchant:

The book "Call Me Max" was an isolated incident in one 3rd grade classroom at Horizon Elementary School. It has not been used in any other schools or classrooms. It was not approved by the Murray City School District Board of Education. A Horizon student brought the book in and asked if the teacher would read the book to the class. The teacher read the book to the class and answered the question you mentioned brought up by the students in the class about growing a beard. The administration at Horizon Elementary was not aware of this book being read until it was brought to their attention by parents. The communication that followed with parents was unfortunate in that several different messages were sent with conflicting information. We understand and appreciate that this has caused concerns of trust with parents. This is a personnel matter that we as a district have addressed with the administration at Horizon Elementary to ensure it does not happen in the future. We have also spoken with all of our administrators so they are aware of what occurred.

6. Will Horizon parents be given factual resolution on which story is true out of what the teacher and administrators told us?

The information we have shared as a district with you has been factual. We acknowledge that things were not handled as well as they could or should have been. The administration of Horizon Elementary will be sending a letter to all third grade parents with the factual information. Parents are also encouraged to contact Horizon Principal Whitney Anderson to discuss concerns they have.

7. If Call Me Max is not a district or school book, why was it seen in MCSD elementary trainings in Summer 2020?

Educators are given all kinds of training so we would need to know specifically which training this is in reference to. Please have the employees who have shared this with you contact Superintendent Covington so that we can further look into what took place and the context of the training.

8. How do parents access the "Additional Resources" list?

If this question is in reference to additional resources lists at Horizon Elementary, the school administration will address that in their forthcoming letter. We are unaware of any other school having an additional resource list. Exhaustive lists of teacher resources used in a classroom are not commonly posted publicly. However, we are happy to provide resource lists and other content upon request. We would ask that you reach out to your school principal to facilitate this.

9. Where will Book Bundles books be moved if they don't remain in the program?

We have pushed pause on the Book Bundle program at the moment to assess protocols and policies around it. We need more time to evaluate the processes and how to best communicate with parents. It is untenable for us to answer this question until that work has been completed.

10. Will parents be made aware of all books of similar content and topics being brought into our schools, regardless of destination?

As we have pushed pause on the Book Bundle program, we recognize we need to review and evaluate our book selection and approval process. We also need to understand the best manner in which to communicate this information to parents to avoid the recent confusion. As we work through these considerations and reach conclusions we will inform parents.

Jennifer Covington - Superintendent
Murray City School District
5102 S. Commerce Drive
Murray, UT 84107
801.264.7400



----- Forwarded message -----

From: [REDACTED]
Date: Tue, Feb 9, 2021 at 1:28 AM
Subject: Re: Murray School District Equity Council
To: Jennifer Covington <jcovington@murrayschools.org>, [REDACTED]
Cc: Glo Merrill <gmerrill@murrayschools.org>, Kami Anderson <kanderson@murrayschools.org>, Belinda Johnson <bjohnson@murrayschools.org>, Elizabeth Payne <epayne@murrayschools.org>, Jaren Cooper <jcooper@murrayschools.org>, [REDACTED] Buck, Sarah <sbuck@murrayschools.org>, Jennifer King <jking@murrayschools.org>, Kauffman, Earl <ekauffman@murrayschools.org>, [REDACTED] Scott Wihongi <swihongi@murrayschools.org>, [REDACTED] Darren Dean <dudean@murrayschools.org>, [REDACTED] mball@murrayschools.org <mball@murrayschools.org>, [REDACTED] wanderson@murrayschools.org <wanderson@murrayschools.org>, [REDACTED] iburnside@murrayschools.org <jburnside@murrayschools.org>, [REDACTED] rteo@murrayschools.org <rteo@murrayschools.org>, [REDACTED] Bouwman, Jim <jbouwman@murrayschools.org>, [REDACTED] jured@murrayschools.org <jalred@murrayschools.org>, [REDACTED] hdolata@murrayschools.org <hdolata@murrayschools.org>

HELLO MS. COVINGTON-

Thank you for your reply and for the work being done surrounding these issues. As a Horizon parent who has more information about the Call Me Max incident, and having spoken with several other Horizon parents about it (as well as other community members and parents from other elementary schools), I am replying to your message to Greg and the others. (I hope I got everyone who was on the first message - I just hit "Reply All.") I have already respond to some of these issues already, but I may repeat some of what he's addressed since these questions and concerns are coming from multiple sources.

We're glad things are being investigated, but many parents don't feel satisfied with the answers (or lack of answers) we have received so far. We still don't understand why the Equity Council has power to correct district memos which state Utah law. The corrected memo came out from MCSD in November 2020 (nearly 3 months ago), so we can reasonably assume that as a district you would already know why the Equity Council was given that power at that time. We would like to understand how and why that happened. Additionally, parents and other community members have received no explanation as to why we weren't alerted of or invited to be part of the Equity Council from the beginning of its formation. We've received no explanation for why MCSD presented in the Utah Pride Center conference, which was advertised as being for all Utah educators, students, and caregivers, but no MCSD parents were informed by the district of that beforehand so that we could take part in viewing it. We would all appreciate direct answers to these questions.

We have heard the information from PTA meetings and the explanations principals were told to give parents about Call Me Max. According to them, the book was brought in by a student, and the teacher mistakenly read it to the whole class. Many parents do not believe this story, which is understandable considering that for 2 weeks they were told by the Horizon teacher and administrators that the book was part of the intended 3rd grade equity and Second Steps curriculum. We feel MCSD needs to explain why conflicting accounts were given to parents. We have been told the incident is currently under investigation and is now a "personnel issue," so that's why we can't have answers. But at the same time, administrators are conclusively telling all other district members that the book was brought in by a student and mistakenly read by the teacher, as if that is the factual conclusion before the investigation has apparently even been finished. That does not make sense to us, and it does not feel honest. Additionally, we would like an explanation for why that same book was seen in MCSD teacher trainings for other elementary schools back in Summer 2020. Honestly, it seems incredibly coincidental that the student at Horizon just happened to have that same book. But regardless of which version is true about how the book appeared, parents were told two different stories by the teacher and administrators, so we feel we deserve factual resolution on what is the real truth.

Furthermore, in the interest of full transparency, parents would like access to the "Additional Resources" list for the Book Bundles. In January, some Horizon parents were told of this list and that possibly it was a list of resource books for school counselors, but no parent ever received it. Some parents were told that Call Me Max and other books of similar topics were found on this list, and it was taken from there to be read in the 3rd grade classroom. We are guessing these "Additional Resources" are probably in all the elementary schools, since at least one of the books found on that list was seen in teacher trainings last summer for other elementary schools.

We've been told by a parent who saw the full Book Bundles list that they have seen these books in their principal's office (in another elementary school besides Horizon). So we're suspecting this same book list was set to be used in all MCSD elementary schools soon. If any of these books are moved from the Book Bundles program, where will they go? Will they be allocated to elementary school libraries? Will they remain in our schools to be read independently by children? What about ALL books (not just Book Bundles or program-specific books) of similar topics and content? Will parents be made aware of these topics and books being brought into our children's schools, no matter the destination (library, counselor's office, etc.)? As stated previously, these books may bring up sensitive discussions, and parents want to (and have the legal right to) be informed about these topics being addressed with their children in schools, no matter how that may happen. Parents of all backgrounds and of all opinions and viewpoints want to feel prepared to cover these discussions with their children when they come home from school. We are all better prepared when we have complete transparency.

We are grateful for the district's help in working through these issues. We're glad the Equity Council and any corresponding programs, including the Book Bundles, will move forward with more transparency and more parent input from now on. We hope future parent meetings will help everyone to get more of their questions answered and will help ensure inclusivity for all. We feel it is important for our children to learn about and be kind and inclusive to all, and because those are such important issues and topics, as parents we want to be fully included in them. We want ALL students and employees to feel welcomed, loved, and safe in MCSD. We hope all members of the district can have a voice in how to best implement these programs and practices for everyone.

In summary, our questions are:

1. Why were parents not informed of or invited to be on the Equity Council?
2. How and why did the Equity Council have power to correct district memos and Utah law?
3. Why didn't the district invite parents to view the Equity Council's presentation in the Utah Pride conference?
4. Why were Horizon parents given conflicting accounts of how Call Me Max appeared in the classroom?
5. If the Call Me Max incident is still under investigation, why is the rest of the district receiving a conclusive answer while Horizon parents are not?
6. Will Horizon parents be given factual resolution on which story is true out of what the teacher and administrators told us?
7. If Call Me Max is not a district or school book, why was it seen in MCSD elementary trainings in Summer 2020?
8. How do parents access the "Additional Resources" list?
9. Where will Book Bundles books be moved if they don't remain in the program?
10. Will parents be made aware of all books of similar content and topics being brought into our schools, regardless of destination?

We look forward to receiving answers to these questions soon.

Thanks for all your help,

[REDACTED] and other MCSD Concerned Parents

On Monday, February 8, 2021, 10:09:05 AM MST [REDACTED] wrote:

Ms. Covington -

Thank you for the reply. I am glad that the materials will be re-evaluated, hopefully parents will be included in that conversation and that our input will be considered when deciding which materials are "developmentally appropriate". As parents, we sincerely seek a safe, tolerant, inclusive and understanding environment for every child in the classroom and to build and maintain trust between parents and administration. Bottom line is that hopefully we all can agree on the necessity of working together from here on out as a partnership and with full disclosure and transparency. To be blunt, it feels like parental rights have been secretly undermined. Regarding the incident at Horizon, I have forwarded your reply to parents at Horizon who can respond directly to that. They are more familiar with the specific facts of the *Call Me Max* incident and can better speak to the conversations, emails, and conflicting information received from teacher, principal, Dr. Jobe, Dr. Dean, etc.

That said, I do have some ongoing concerns: You have expressed a commitment to be "open and transparent." However, you didn't respond to my request for a parent meeting - can you tell me if that is on the table? Moreover, the Equity Council's presentation has been blocked from viewing: https://www.youtube.com/watch?fbclid=IwAR13qj_9L3lnJS0l_JpQ_FRLRnh-WdkR96Evpc0cV-0F2T-JLcWluayzNbw&v=P29NAz2RH-4&feature=youtu.be. This does not seem to be moving toward transparency? I did take notes and Dr. Jobe specifically said the books on the Equity Books Bundle had been approved by the School Board. Dr. Dean was part of that video presentation and he did not dispute her statement and has not replied to my emails. Parents were also told the Bundle had been approved and that the Book Bundles have been distributed to other schools in the District. In the interests of transparency, if this "personnel issue" is affecting our children and rights as parents, I think we deserve some additional explanation and clarification. In the interests of transparency, is Dr. Dean willing to explain why the Equity Council (that we did not know existed) was able to pressure him into apologizing for a memorandum that explained that pursuant to Utah law "a public-school classroom is reserved for its intended purpose of importing relevant instructions and is not an open forum for employees to engage in their own political speech" and instead approved "equity-based curriculum, conversations, dialogue, and displays" without any notice to parents of this change in philosophy and approach. Before the Equity Council resumes full operation, will we be fully informed about its purposes, goals, and objectives and how our students' curriculum will be affected by its "core beliefs". Will parental involvement be permitted or will participants continue to be hand-picked?

Why was it not posted on the school or district website? If it was a student who brought in *Call Me Max*, did that student also bring in *Julian is a Mermaid* and the written assignment that went along with it? *Julian is a Mermaid* touches on gender-fluidity and was not on the Equity Book Bundles list sent to parents.

As part of the Equity Council's presentation, Dr. Dean said that the Equity Council was a grassroots movement. It was such a grassroots movement, that none of us knew about it. There is a grassroots movement of parents who are very concerned about what has happened and making sure it gets fixed. I am aware of dozens of parents who are concerned. It is not just me - as I am sure you are becoming aware. We look forward to a more open dialogue and that as "we show due regard" for teachers and students "feelings, rights, cultures, and traditions," there can also be due regard for parents' rights.

Most appreciately, [REDACTED]

On Fri, Feb 5, 2021 at 3:39 PM Jennifer Covington <jcovington@murrayschools.org> wrote:

[REDACTED] Thank you for the follow up questions. I am happy to address them in hopes of providing the clarity you are asking for. Please know that we do value parents and parental input and never want anything to feel like it is being done in secret.

The book "Call Me Max" was an isolated incident in one 3rd grade classroom at Horizon Elementary School. It has not been used in any other schools or classrooms. It was not approved by the Murray City School District Board of Education. A Horizon student brought the book in and asked if the teacher would read the book to the class. The teacher read the book to the class and answered the question you mentioned brought up by the students in the class about growing a beard. The administration at Horizon Elementary was not aware of this book being read until it was brought to their attention by parents. The communication that followed with parents was unfortunate in that several different messages were sent with conflicting information. We understand and appreciate that this has caused concerns of trust with parents. This is a personnel matter that we as a district have addressed with the administration at Horizon Elementary to ensure it does not happen in the future. We have also spoken with all of our administrators so they are aware of what occurred.

With regard to the equity book bundles, a presentation was made to the school board by Dr. Jobe in the fall that listed the books the school would be using throughout the year. The board did not review or approve these - it was simply part of a presentation that was made to the board. Horizon Elementary is the only school that has implemented these equity book bundles at this time. As mentioned in my last email, all equity book bundle books have been suspended while we work to put a process in place where these books will be reviewed by educators and approved by the School Community Council. We are committed to being fully transparent with this process and ensure our parents are fully informed.

The Equity Council was formed by educators, who were feeling unsafe as employees in our school system, as a place where we could look at policy to ensure equal employment opportunity for all. When Trayvon Martin was killed and tensions in our state and country rose, the equity committee broadened their focus to ensure all of our students felt safe and welcomed in our schools. Another individual did let me know that a parent had been told that the Equity Council did not want any more 'white-identifying' people on the council. Our Director of Human Services and Student Services serves on this council and was not aware of anyone being told this. I asked that parent who told me this to please have that individual, or any individual who was told that, to please contact me personally so I could hear their story and address it appropriately. At this time, all work with the equity council has been suspended while we work to ensure a solid direction and framework moving forward that will have many voices.

Our goals moving forward are to put policy and measures in place to ensure that we are open and transparent with books that are being read in the classroom and the mission, purpose and vision of Equity Council. We respect the rights and values of parents and do want to work together. As an education community, we want to show respect by acknowledging differences, looking for the good in everyone, and showing due regard for others' feelings, rights, cultures, and traditions. Our actions as educators and parents will demonstrate our belief that we are better when we are working together on behalf of every child.

Jennifer Covington - Superintendent
Murray City School District
5102 S. Commerce Drive
Murray, UT 84107
801.264.7400



On Thu, Feb 4, 2021 at 2:05 AM [REDACTED] wrote:

Dear Ms. Covington and Others:

Thank you for the replies, I appreciate your time and what appears to be your commitment to transparency going forward. I also appreciate that some of these issues are being discussed and re-evaluated. Although most of my questions weren't answered, that's understandable - there were a lot of them. Hopefully at some point they will be. I hate taking your time on this issue and, to be honest, I hate taking so much of my own time on it. But something is happening here in Murray that just doesn't seem right - and is causing many of us deep concern.

Transparency and parental involvement should be the biggest learning lesson. We all want our kids to be safe and for teachers and parents to have resources. But regardless of any parent's opinion on the propriety of teaching some of these things in school, I would think all parents can agree that we deserve to be advised of what sensitive and complicated issues are being taught and how they are being presented in ADVANCE and be given the opportunity to provide consent and be prepared for questions that arise (for instance, I would assume that a parent with a child experiencing gender identity issues would especially want to know how that topic is being addressed before it happens).

Since my last email to you, I have been receiving information that has left me quite bewildered and confused. Many other parents seem to feel the same way. Conflicting information has been coming from Dr. Jobe and other school personnel regarding how *Julian is a Mermaid* and *Call Me Max* ended up being read to a 3rd grade class at Horizon without parental consent. One parent was told that the book was brought by a student or parent and read by the teacher to the class. Dr. Jobe said that "Call Me Max" was only read to help a student feel supported for a specific incident and she sent a parent an Equity book list that did not include *Call Me Max* or *Julian is a Mermaid*. Dr. Jobe also apparently said that she didn't believe LGBTQ+ issues should be discussed until 6th grade.

Another parent was told that those books were part of the curriculum and were part of the school and district's focus on equity work and Second Steps program. The 3rd grade teacher told another parent that reading these books were part of the school and district's focus on equity and anti-racist work and she included copies of the school district's memoranda as proof that the materials were approved (inferring that advance notice to parents was not required). She said that the books were part of their equity lessons for the week. Dr. Jobe told another parent that the lessons are wonderful and developmentally appropriate and included a list of the equity books for the year, which DID include both *Julian is a Mermaid* and *Call Me Max*. In addition, Dr. Jobe apparently told at least one parent that the equity book bundles had been approved by the Murray School Board, but a member of the board has said that was not true. So parents are being told two different things by Dr. Jobe and others. Either it was an isolated incident or it was part of an approved plan. Either the books were approved by the Board or they weren't. Either the books are developmentally appropriate or should wait until 6th grade. It can't be both. So, Number One, there seems to be a problem with getting true and accurate information, and Number Two, parents were never given notice and never provided consent. Utah Code Section 53E-9-203 requires parental consent before topics involving "sexual behavior, orientation or attitudes" are discussed. This was acknowledged by the First Memorandum sent to District personnel, in August, before the Equity Council (as claimed in their video at the Utah Pride conference) successfully persuaded the District to send a revised Memorandum with an apology that substitutes "Equity" in place of Utah Law.

What I have been told is that these two books were part of the Equity Book Bundles program administered by Dr. Jobe. Parents became concerned after their children came home and mentioned the teacher had talked to them about how science has made it possible for women who want to become men to grow a beard after going through puberty. If I understand correctly, certain parents received a list from Dr. Jobe, after the fact, informing them that "Call Me Max" was part of the curriculum

school year, without parents' knowledge or consent. Moreover, Call Me Max was apparently incorporated into teacher trainings last summer.

Prior to Call Me Max, the 3rd Graders read and did an assignment on Julian is a Mermaid. The author Jessica Love says about this book that "As a genderfluid person, I didn't see this as a transgender book, but more about the freedom of gender expression," and originally it was about how Julian wanted to be a drag queen, but the author changed it to a mermaid because "there's something magical about how mermaids have no genitalia." Remember, this is for 3rd grade. The students then did an assignment where the worksheet says that Julian sees himself as a mermaid in the story, and asks them to draw a picture in a mirror of what they would like to become. Could it be that Julian is a Mermaid was preparing them for Call Me Max? Here is a link to Call Me Max where you can see that a child is looking in a mirror (like the assignment in Julian is a Mermaid) and sees herself as a boy who is transgender. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jcrPnaCbKrY>. The book goes on to state that when a baby is born and parents call the baby a boy or girl, if the baby could talk the baby might say "NO I'M NOT" because the parents made a mistake. So without parents' consent or knowledge, the children are being taught at school that their parents may have made a mistake in calling them a boy or a girl. Again this is in 3rd grade.

So can you please clear this up? Were the books and Equity Bundles approved by the School District, only approved by Dr. Jobe, or implemented by the Equity Council? If the Equity Council, who formed the Equity Council and where does it derive its authority? I was sent a document with the Mission of the Equity Council. It is attached. One of the core beliefs is centering those impacted by marginalization in the curriculum. According to the document, marginalized include people of color, disabled, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer people, immigrants, etc. When I think of centering, it sounds like the curriculum and teaching will place these categories in the center, or the focus, or top priority. It also talks about an intersectional approach, which from the Utah Pride Center lectures we watched, means "unlearning all binaries" such as male and female. Based on Call Me Max and Dr Jobe's involvement with the Equity Council, this centering and these teachings have been happening at least as early as 3rd grade. Nowhere in the document is there anything about seeking parental input, buy-in, or consent; instead, the "group norm" is to "call others out". Apparently, at least one parent has been told the Equity Council doesn't want any more "white-identifying" people on the council. Is that accurate?

I am not the only one seeking additional information. Many parents are concerned and many more than I realized. Can you please provide us with the real story on what has been happening and what the goals are going forward? I agree that those who may be "marginalized" may have unique challenges that need to be addressed in a sensitive manner. That is all the more reason to involve us in the process. At the same time, I am learning that according to the "Equity" agenda, Equity is not about "Equality". According to Ten Commitments for Equity-Literate Educators: "Equity is not about valuing every perspective. An equity view does not value heteronormativity," and "educational outcome disparities are the result of structural inequities and have nothing to do with students' grittiness, mindsets..." I fundamentally disagree with a philosophy that elevates victimhood and ignores individual choice and accountability.

Perhaps an in-person meeting with parents would be helpful - one that is calm and involves transparent discourse and explanations. The more transparency, the more understanding. Maybe then fewer bridges will be burned and more bridges can be built. We all want what is best for the kids, even if we see things from different perspectives. To find common ground we need to be able to trust that our rights as parents will be valued and respected. When things are hidden, it feels like we are somehow the enemy. We want to work together, PLEASE work with us and not in secret or behind our backs. You might ask, why do you care so much, your kids don't go to Horizon?? I watched the video from the Utah Pride Center conference and Dr. Jobe made it very clear that this is meant to be incorporated District-wide.

Thanks [REDACTED]

On Tue, Feb 2, 2021 at 4:45 PM Jennifer Covington <jcovington@murrayschools.org> wrote:

Thank you for your email. We value and appreciate your thoughts. We agree that it is important that students, employees and families in the Murray City School District are able to participate in a school system that values and respects each person. Transparency and communication are also essential to what we do and believe. We are committed to doing our best in both of these areas.

The Equity Council was started a little over a year ago with the mission of building a diverse, equitable, and inclusive district by providing all students, families, and employees with a community of care, respect, and belonging. At present, the council consists of educators, administrators, and parents. At this time, the Equity Council has been suspended while the district and School Board work to put measures in place to ensure the purpose of the council is clear, defined, and communicated to all parents and employees. You are correct that these are complicated issues with no easy answers and it is important that parents have a voice in the work that is being done as we work to support all students.

The Equity Book Bundles have also been placed on hold at this time while we work to put procedures in place to ensure transparency and communication. The district is working on an action plan where educators and then the School Community Council will review all equity materials. Parents will be fully informed of what is being used in the classroom and provided with additional information regarding the materials. Parents will also have the ability to opt their child out of any reading by simply notifying their teacher.

We want to be thoughtful and intentional as we work on both of these areas. All procedures and measures will be shared with our parents as we agree that transparency and communication are vital.

Thank you for your advocacy of not only your students but all students. As a district, we are committed to working to make sure parents are fully informed of what is happening in their child's classroom.

Jennifer Covington - Superintendent
Murray City School District
5102 S. Commerce Drive
Murray, UT 84107
801.264.7400



On Mon, Feb 1, 2021 at 4:50 PM [REDACTED] wrote:

To Members of the Board, Superintendent, and Chairs of Community Councils (at Viewmont, Riverview and Murray High):

My wife and I are parents of 4 students that each attend one of the above-referenced schools - and my wife is a former teacher who often substitute teaches at Viewmont Elementary at teacher's requests. She isn't involved in the drafting of this email and is seeing it for the first time along with you, though she was aware I would be sending it. Our children are good students and the Murray Schools have been a nice fit for our family. Our children are generally shy and sometimes have a hard time making new friends, but we try to help them through that as parents - and they have had good teachers. We would hope that all teachers and staff would look at them as individuals who need help, support, guidance, and skills-training - not because, or in spite of, their gender, sexual orientation, race, religion or any other category.

With that backdrop, I recently learned about the Murray School Equity Council that was apparently created some time ago. I don't believe parents have been told about this Council, have we? If we were, somehow I missed the memo. I watched two of many videos/lectures (that have now been taken down) from the Utah Pride Center's recent conference for Utah Educators. One video that was extremely concerning to me was the Keynote Speaker Dr. Kyl Myers. I also viewed the presentation by the Murray School District's Equity Council. As I said, the videos are no longer able to be viewed, but I did take some notes while watching the presentations. Based on those lectures, I would like to ask you some questions to find out more about the Equity Council, what their goals and objectives are, and how this will affect the children and our family.

1. In the Equity Council's video presentation a question was asked about how it has been received by the parents. The answer was basically that they need to do a better job getting the word out to the parents. I would agree with that. How do we find out about what the Equity Council is doing? Do they have open meetings? Are their agendas shared with the community councils? Are the community councils giving input? Can you please let me know the best way to

2. In the Equity Council's video presentation, they mentioned that one of their greatest "Successes" was that the council was able to get the District to rescind a Memorandum that went out to District personnel in August by issuing a revised Memorandum in November. I have now read all these memoranda (see attached) and the first one seemed to communicate that the School District would follow Utah law and could control political speech in the classroom. The last one apologizes for being "harmful to the community" and appears to put "Equity" as the overriding principle governing Educators. Was the council really the body that achieved this "Success"? How did they do it? Should parents have been informed? No one asked me whether the Memorandum was harmful - were other parents asked? A memorandum to personnel regarding what will be allowed in the classroom directly impacts all parents and children in the district. Should we draw any conclusions from the fact that the first memorandum was issued before the election and the last one was three weeks after the election?

3. I have been informed that a book called Call Me Max, dealing with transgenderism, was read in a 3rd grade class in our district without parental consent. When those parents objected, the teacher cited them to the 3rd memorandum that was apparently released due to the Equity Council's successful initiative. Is it true that parents do not need to be informed when subjects regarding sexual orientation, transgenderism, the Black Lives Matter organization, gender issues are taught to our children? We had to sign a consent form for our child to watch "Because of Winn Dixie", but if it is a book on transgenderism is subject matter for the 3rd grade classroom, no parental consent is required?

4. In the introduction to the keynote address at the Utah Pride Center's conference for Utah Educators, the speaker made the point that schools are not about "transferring knowledge," but should be about engaging in discussions that "bring about change." I would like to know what the Murray School District's view is with respect to that comment? Who agrees with that premise and who disagrees? Is Murray School District's primary objective to help our students engage in discussions that bring about change? If so, what change?

5. The Keynote Speaker made the point that she now teaches at a University where she doesn't have to deal with communications from parents. Does Murray School District value and appreciate and incorporate parental input? What is being done to be transparent about what our children are being taught? Does Murray District agree with me that there should be more transparency, not less? Do you agree that parents have a right to know what is being taught in the classroom regarding controversial subjects in society and how those issues are being presented? That we should focus more on educating our students to be productive, qualified, and skilled in the work force and being respectful citizens rather than on social engineering and political indoctrination? What is your stance?

6. The keynote speaker said that all students, parents and staff need to "unlearn all binaries" and to be retrained. In other words, no children should be looked at as male or female without the students first indicating what they want to be called. I assume this would also mean that if a student who is biologically a male says he is a female, he would be allowed to use the girls bathroom. Is this how the Equity Council and Murray School District view the world? If this is the direction we will go, will parental input be considered? An example she gave of improper gender bias was having a "Daddy Daughter Dance" or "Muffins with Mothers". We have had similar events in our children's schools, does the Equity Council aim to cancel these types of things?

7. Have you thought about whether the term "Equity" could really be a code word for opening the door to ignoring the Utah Constitution and the right of parents to have a say in their children's education? Are you in favor of the school system being revolutionized to incorporate political agendas and to replace basic and common sense teachings of mutual respect and courtesy with those political agendas? Are you in favor of using "Equity" to treat people differently based on certain "marginalized" categories with the goal of achieving equal outcomes rather than working toward providing equal opportunities? If yes to these questions, will you please let us know that in a transparent way? The Equity Council said something to the effect that one of their core beliefs is to center those most impacted by "marginalization" in the curriculum, policies, and practices. What does that mean?

8. The Equity Council mentioned some kind of an Equity Book bundle that is available or will become available. Do parents have access to this?

9. The Equity Council mentioned getting an equity director appointed at each school. Will we be informed before this happens? What is the criteria and what will they do? Will it be a paid position?

10. Jordan School District has Culture and Diversity Specialists who have begun doing training in classrooms. Will Murray School District have similar positions? Will parents be informed on what specifics are being taught?

Black Lives Matter and other people are trying to get a State School Board Member removed from the State Board of Education because she shared some of the lectures that were presented at the Utah Pride Center conference, including the two that I mention above, and because she is standing up for Utah families and the right of parents to know what their students are being taught. I'm attaching a copy of a message they sent to the Utah State School Board. To me it sounds anything but tolerant, anything but understanding, and anything but being willing to engage in a dialogue or conversation. Calling someone racist and homophobic because of differences of opinion does not sound like Equity to me, it kind of comes across more like bullying. Another group criticized her because she is advocating for the Golden Rule - doing unto others as we would have done unto us. To them, somehow that principle violates separation of church and state and is white supremacist.

I have not in the past been involved in Community Councils, but I can see that is a mistake because I had no idea that an Equity Council even existed, let alone that they are giving lectures on the changes that need to happen in our school system. Any information or answers you can provide to the questions raised in this email would be greatly appreciated and to each of us as parents going forward. My hope is that you will seek, consider, and appreciate the input of parents instead of only those groups who will scream, intimidate, threaten, and cancel.

Thanks [REDACTED]

FROM : Sarah Paul via Parentsquare
To : wanderson@murrayschools.org
Subject : RE: New message from Sarah Paul in Horizon Elementary School

Sarah Paul replied to your conversation.

Message sent on Monday, Jan 11 at 8:41 AM to Whitney Anderson

[View or Reply](#)

Please do not reply directly to this email. Click the "View or Reply" button to send a reply to Sarah Paul.

On Monday, Jan 11 at 8:23 AM, Sarah Paul wrote:

Hello,

I understand there are concerns with two of the books read during our equity lessons last week, "Julian is a Mermaid" and "Call me Max". As a school and district, we are focusing on equity and antiracist work. Reading books about all people is part of this. Additionally, we learn about equity during our Wednesday Second Steps curriculum. Learning about transgender, gay and straight people in developmentally appropriate ways is part of our district and school.

Here is a link to Julian is a Mermaid: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E44zjYyxWg>

Here is a link to Call Me Max: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jcrPnaCbKrY>

Class discussions with these books were intended to teach students to feel confidence in themselves as well as accepting others. We also talked about gender norms like in clothing or colors and how you should be able to like any color or wear any clothes despite your gender. I answered student questions as they arose honestly and in developmentally appropriate ways.

I would like to clarify that there was no discussion on puberty. One student asked how they grew a beard. I replied by stating that science has found ways to help them, to which another student replied, "like medicine." I felt the need to clarify with students that this is not something that happens until they are an adult. Again, one student replied, "oh after puberty." A few students began repeating the word puberty because they thought it was funny. I quickly shut that down and we moved on.

Despite the sidetracked conversations, I feel students benefited from these books with a sense of confidence in who they are and an ability to accept others.

I follow state administrative code and guidelines around transgender issues: I attached some of the guidelines below as well as the district's memo on equity.

Principal Anderson and Vice Principal Jobe are happy to answer any further questions or concerns you may have.

Sarah Paul

Stay involved with your child's learning and activities at school.



This message is intended for wanderson@murrayschools.org. If you received this email in error or wish to disable your account, [click here to unsubscribe](#).

ParentSquare Inc • 3905 State St, Suite 7502 • Santa Barbara, CA 93105

From : "Darren Dean"
To : "Whitney Anderson"
Subject : Re: Potential Response to [REDACTED]

Sounds great. If I can help in any way please let me know. :)
Darren Dean
Director of Personnel & Student Services
Murray City School District
Office: 801-264-7466
Cell: 801-647-0339



On Wed, Jan 13, 2021 at 11:13 AM Whitney Anderson <wanderson@murrayschools.org> wrote:

I'll call [REDACTED] and see if we can have a conversation to answer her questions. Thanks everyone for your help and problem solving on this. I want students, teachers, and parents to be a part of this and we can work out better ways to communicate and be transparent.

Mrs. Whitney Anderson
Principal - Horizon Elementary
801.264.7420



On Wed, Jan 13, 2021 at 10:55 AM Vanessa Jobe <vjobe@murrayschools.org> wrote:

The parent square at the beginning of all this equity work had an overwhelming amount of support. We can do more than that parent square to continue transparency.

This part is concerning; Board Member Johnson said it was conveyed to her that teachers were informed in a faculty meeting that the administration didn't want parents informed about the books that are being read/discussed during the equity lessons. The whole point of our equity work is to include everyone. Our community included. Do we have specifics on who that came from or do we need to address this as a full staff? Missy was at the meeting where we talked about LGBTQIA+ as a faculty. I said that parent consent was not needed to read about students of different backgrounds: but all the books, lessons were already communicated via parent square. That could be where the break down in communication happened.

Am I reading that it is expected that we going to keep a list of people who are opting out of their students learning about transgender and gay students?

Thank you for the feedback. We can ramp up the transparency for sure. I just am a bit upset, overwhelmed and confused right now because I shared all of this with all admin, with the board and everyone said it was wonderful until we talked about transgender students. I can talk whenever if that is better.
Vanessa

On Wed, Jan 13, 2021 at 10:19 AM Jennifer Covington <jcovington@murrayschools.org> wrote:

I just had a good meeting with Board Member Johnson who relayed she has had 7 parents contact her. I have also received several email and phone calls this morning. We had a good, thoughtful discussion that centered on the following two areas.

Relationships

This is a unique year where parents are not in the schools to the level they have been in the past. They have not had the ability to build a rapport with the new administration or establish relationships. Most of them have only met their child's teacher over Zoom. Having not had the opportunity to build these relationships like in years past makes communicating and over-communicating incredibly important - especially when instituting new programs. As I mentioned yesterday, I believe there is great value in having your Community Council discuss the equity topics and resources that will be used each month. This would be a good measure to take in building trust and establishing some parental relationships.

Transparency/Communication

Parents want to be informed of the equity topics being discussed each week and the resources that will be used. This will allow them to be better prepared to have additional conversations at home. Students are at varying developmental levels. For example, I am sure some of our 3rd graders still believe in Santa Clause while others have seen and experienced far more mature issues. Having parents aware of what is being discussed will give them the opportunity to further discuss at home in a manner that is appropriate to their child.

Just like with anything else we teach, parents should always have the right to view the materials and opt their child out. (When I was the principal at Hillcrest, I had some parents who would opt their children out of a portion of the science curriculum when evolution was discussed. We honored that as a parental right.) As we discussed yesterday, having teachers send out weekly what the equity topic is and what resources will be used will provide important information to the parents. Giving parents the ability to Zoom into the lesson will also provide transparency.

Board Member Johnson said it was conveyed to her that teachers were informed in a faculty meeting that the administration didn't want parents informed about the books that are being read/discussed during the equity lessons. This may or may not be accurate but if teachers are feeling in any way that they have to keep things from parents - that does present a problem. We need to be open and transparent with all that we do. If at any point we have to say to ourselves "I don't want parents to know about this" we need to re-examine what we are doing.

Finally, I wanted to let you know that I was made aware this morning that this has 'grown legs' far outside of the Horizon community. I have received phone calls from concerned constituents from other schools. I have directed them to talk to their students' teachers and principals with regards to what is being discussed in their child's classroom. I was also just made aware that an outside individual with political ties in Utah has heard the book "I Am Max" was read in the third grade classroom and has been reaching out to parents in those classrooms encouraging parents to contact a specified lawyer regarding the fact they were not informed of what was taking place. It is my understanding parents are hesitant to do this and really just want to work with the school. I'll keep my ears open if I hear any additional information on this.

being open and transparent with our parents we will see great outcomes in moving this work forward. Not one parent has said they don't believe that focusing on equity is the wrong thing to do - they simply want to be informed on what is happening in the classroom. I also think it is important that books that are used are age appropriate and are vetted through your Community Council which will help give parents voice in this important work.

Jennifer Covington - Superintendent
Murray City School District
5102 S. Commerce Drive
Murray, UT 84107
801.264.7400



On Wed, Jan 13, 2021 at 8:51 AM Vanessa Jobe <vjobe@murrayschools.org> wrote:

I have tried that with [REDACTED] too (like [REDACTED] wants things "in writing". Also, many of [REDACTED] statements were taken directly from communication with [REDACTED]

On Wed, Jan 13, 2021 at 8:32 AM Darren Dean <ddean@murrayschools.org> wrote:

Vanessa,

I know that your previous parent wanted to communicate via email, but my preference is always to meet or have a phone conversation when parents are concerned. I would send [REDACTED] an email asking [REDACTED] if you could schedule a time to meet and/or talk with her. That would be my thought.

Darren :)

Darren Dean
Director of Personnel & Student Services
Murray City School District
Office: 801-264-7466
Cell: 801-647-0339



On Wed, Jan 13, 2021 at 8:19 AM Vanessa Jobe <vjobe@murrayschools.org> wrote:

Hi [REDACTED]

We are happy to post our equity lessons so all parents can see them. I will include the books about supporting transgender students on our list. Those were not included at first because we did not think they were necessary. As we learned more about our student populations we learned they are necessary.

We are working on setting up our website to list the specifics that you have asked for. We would love to support as much transparency as possible.

Yes we made an informed decision about the two books as an admin and teacher team. This law 53E-9-203 does not include children's books that support transgender students.

We hope that these changes will support you and all families as we continue this work.
Thank you so much for your communication

--

Vanessa Jobe, Ed.D.
Horizon Elementary Assistant Principal
(she/her/ hers)
801.264.7420

--

Vanessa Jobe, Ed.D.
Horizon Elementary Assistant Principal
(she/her/ hers)
801.264.7420

--
Vanessa Jobe, Ed.D.
Horizon Elementary Assistant Principal
(she/her/ hers)
801.264.7420

From : "Sarah Paul"
To : "Whitney Anderson", "mluna@murrayschools.org"
Subject: RE: Transgender discussions 3rd grade DLJ
Attachment : Equity.pdf;

Hello,

I understand there are concerns with one of the books read during our equity lessons last week, "Julian is a Mermaid". As a school and district, we are focusing on equity and antiracist work. Reading books about all people is part of this. Additionally, we learn about equity during our Wednesday Second Steps curriculum. Learning about transgender, gay and straight people in developmentally appropriate ways is part of our district and school.

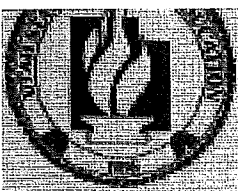
Here is a link to Julian is a Mermaid: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F44zjYyxnWg>

Class discussions with this book were intended to teach students to feel confidence in themselves as well as accepting others. We also talked about gender norms like in clothing or colors and how you should be able to like any color or wear any clothes despite your gender. I answered student questions as they arose honestly and in developmentally appropriate ways.

Despite the sidetracked conversations, I feel students benefited from these books with a sense of confidence in who they are and an ability to accept others.

I follow state administrative code and guidelines around transgender issues: I attached some of the guidelines below as well as the district's memo on equity.

Principal Anderson and Vice Principal Jobe are happy to answer any further questions or concerns you may have.
Sarah Paul



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Sydney Dickson, State Superintendent of Public Instruction
Lorraine Austin, Board Secretary

September 18, 2017

RE: Clarification of Recent Changes to R277-474-3, School Instruction and Human Sexuality, General Provisions

Dear LEA Chairs, Superintendents and Charter School Administrators:

Earlier this year the Utah Legislature passed Senate Bill 196, Health Education Amendments, which revised requirements for the adoption of instructional materials related to human sexuality contained in U.C.A. § 53A-13-101. SB196 eliminated prohibitions related to the advocacy of homosexuality and added a prohibition related to the advocacy of premarital or extramarital sexual activity. As a result, the Utah State Board of Education (Board) revised Administrative Rule 277-474-3 to track the changes to U.C.A. § 53A-13-101. The purpose of this letter is to clarify the Board's intent behind its recent revisions to R277-474-3.

The Utah State Board of Education desires each student in Utah public schools to receive a high quality education free from all manner of discrimination, which can take the form of bullying, based on religion, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and gender identity. Further, we are aware that some local education agencies still maintain old policies that do not reflect the recent changes to U.C.A. § 53A-13-101, R277-474, and federal law. Such outdated policies based on older versions of U.C.A. § 53A-13-101 and R277-474 are invalid. To the extent your district or school maintains outdated policies, these policies should be revised so they align with the current version of U.C.A. § 53A-13-101 and R277-474, and reflect the Board's intent to prohibit discrimination against all Utah's students. Districts and charter schools that fail to follow the Board's rules are subject to further Board action pursuant to R277-114, Corrective Action and Withdrawal or Reduction of Program Funds.

Sincerely,

Mark Huntsman, Chair
Utah State Board of Education

Sydney Dickson, Ed.D.
State Superintendent of Public Instruction

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Sunday, January 10, 2021 10:41 PM
To: Whitney Anderson; spaul@murrayschools.org; mluna@murrayschools.org
Subject: Transgender discussions 3rd grade DLI

Hi there-
It was brought to my attention this weekend by another parent whose child is in the 3rd grade DLI program that a couple of books on transgender topics have been read and discussed in Ms. Paul's class. I believe these books are "Julian is a Mermaid" and "Call Me Max". I was also told that the students discussed and asked questions about transgender ideas, and the question was asked about how the transgender male grew a beard (in Call Me Max), so Ms. Paul explained that people can take medication to grow a beard or not grow a beard, if they want to change their gender. I'm just paraphrasing what I heard through the grapevine, so if I'm wrong on any of these details, feel free to correct me.

I'm concerned that these books are being read and these discussions are taking place without parents' knowledge. (I heard from several other moms in the class and it was a surprise to each one.) I was aware that our students were reading books about diversity and equality, and I think those are important topics and discussions, and I'm grateful that you teachers are taking them on and helping our kids learn to be kind and accepting of others, no matter our differences. However, I did not realize that these books and discussions would also include LGBTQ+ issues, and I feel that's something that parents should be formally informed about before it happens. I do realize LGBTQ+ issues are important, and I want my son and all my children to be informed, aware, kind and accepting. I am just concerned that topics which involve sexuality are more sensitive, especially for children this young. These are topics I would like to address with my son, and I want to be fully aware of what is being said about them in his classroom, so that I can be involved in the discussion with him and be there

program. I would also like to have the option to attend (via zoom or in-person) these discussions, especially on topics that veer into sensitive and/or sexuality issues. That way we, as parents, can be better aware of what is being talked about and more prepared to address these topics with our children when they come home from school. Would these ideas be doable? Please let me know your thoughts.

As always, thank you for all you do for our children. I know all of you teachers work tirelessly, and I appreciate it so much. Thank you also for listening to my concerns as a parent. I look forward to hearing from you.



From : "Whitney Anderson"
To : [REDACTED]
Cc : "Jennifer Covington" , "Vanessa Jobe" , "Darren Dean"
Subject : Re: Transgender Lesson

[REDACTED]

Thank you for reaching out with your concerns. I understand where you are coming from. We are having discussions (school level and district level) and trying to find ways to have more transparency and communication with the books. We have paused our equity work until we can put systems in place to ensure that all stakeholders are informed with the books and lessons that are put in place.

Our plan for the future is to put the book list on our website along with the schedule for when the books will be read in class. If additional books are wanting to be added to the list, we will have them go through a teacher committee and then to our parent committee (School Community Council). If both committees approve the book, they will be added to the website list and parents will be notified of the additional book. If at any time you do not feel that you want your student to participate in any of the topics or books (or any lesson taught in the classroom) you can let the teacher know and they can be excused from that lesson.

If you have additional suggestions or questions with this process, please let me know. We want to work together to find solutions.

Mrs. Whitney Anderson
Principal - Horizon Elementary
801.264.7420



On Tue, Jan 19, 2021 at 12:14 AM [REDACTED] wrote:
Hello,

I would just like to express my concern for the equity lesson that was taught to my 8 year old daughter without my permission. In class the book "Call me Max" was read to the students and the students learned about the author who is now a man. They were curious as to how he was able to grow a beard when he was once a girl. The students were taught that when they are older they can take medicine to grow or not grow a beard if they really feel like a boy or a girl on the inside. How confusing is that for an eight year old?!? I understand times are changing, but I do not understand how it is ok for this information to be taught in class without giving the parents a heads up. The maturation program requires parent permission, why not this lesson? This is something I would have liked to teach my child when I felt the time was right and in my own way. I understand these lessons are intended to teach students confidence in themselves and in accepting others, I do not believe that that book needed to be shared in order to do that.

I have been in contact with my daughter's teacher and she has done a great job explaining her reasoning. It sounds like she has just been following the district's guidelines on equity. I still do not agree with these lessons being taught in the classroom and I know there are other parents who have the same concerns. Are there any changes that can be made? More transparency with the curriculum?

Thank you.
[REDACTED]

From : "Vanessa Jobe"
 To : [REDACTED]
 Cc : "Sarah Paul" , "Whitney Anderson" , "Jennifer Covington"
 Subject : Re: Transparency in the Equity Program

Hi [REDACTED]
 Thank you for your message and for working with us to understand. Mrs. Anderson and I are happy to hold a zoom call with you. We want to support you and ensure you are comfortable. Until then, here are some answers for your questions.

"I am Max" was not read in your child's class. That book was brought and discussed in the other class. The book was read in order to help a student feel supported. It was for a specific incident that helped to create a conversation of empathy and understanding.

We agree, we want you and all parents to feel in the loop. In September I sent out a Parent Square message introducing the equity books and the purpose behind the books. I sent the following book list to parents as well. Many parents ordered the books and have a set at home to further conversations. How can we help you feel more in the loop? I have included our second steps and equity themes along with all of the book titles and grade levels.

I included the Fact Sheet on the US Department of Education Policy (Specifically the Letter on Transgender Students). In terms of curriculum, we are working to ensure that all students feel supported and welcomed at our school and that we also follow educational policy. Specific curriculum is not outlined, it is just ensuring non discriminatory practices in schools.

Ms. Paul sends out her weekly calendar, on Wednesdays during the "Equity Lessons" are when these conversations come up. Being welcoming to transgender students was relevant and important for this week. Listed below are the other topics we have covered this year. Please let us know when the best time for a Zoom meeting would be. Thank you for your communication.

-Dr. Jobe

Fact Sheet (US Department of Education Policy):

<https://www.transequality.org/sites/default/files/ED-DCL-Fact-Sheet.pdf>

Second Steps and Equity Themes Schedule:

August	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Safety, Respect and Race
September	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Being Assertive and Language
October	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Empathy, Sexuality & Gender and Understanding Differences
November	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Managing Learning Challenges and Ability
December	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Problem Solving and Class
January	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Handling Name Calling and Equity Issue that pertains to your class.
February	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Black History Month and Being Responsible
March	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Circle back on whichever topic your class could use more support on
April	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Circle back on whichever topic your class could use more support on
May	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Celebrating Cultures

Equity Book List for all Grades:

Book	Grade Level
All Are Welcome- Pengold	Special Education

Little Legends: Exceptional Black Men in History- Harrison	Special Education
Who Was Frederick Douglass- Prince	Special Education
Who Did it first? -Hart	Special Education/ 1st Grade
Black is a Rainbow Color- Joy	Kinder
Be You! -Reynolds	Kinder
Tiger Days: A Book of Feelings- Clark	Kinder
AntiRacist Baby- Kendi	Kinder
You Matter- Robinson	1st Grade
I am Human- Verde/ Reynolds	1st Grade
La princesa and the Pea- Elya	2nd Grade
Ohana Means Family- Loomis	2nd Grade
The Day You Begin- Woodson	2nd Grade
A Family is a Family is a Family- O'Leary	2nd Grade
Of Thee I Sing: A Letter to My Daughters- Obama	3rd Grade
Little Leaders: Bold Women in Black History- Harrison	3rd Grade
Fry Bread: A Native American Family Story- Millard	3rd Grade
The Bell Rang- Ransome	3rd Grade

Book	Grade Level
Word Collector- Reynolds	3rd Grade
Paper Kingdom- Rhee	3rd Grade
The Oldest Student: How Mary Walker Learned to Read- Hubbard	4th Grade
What Was the March on Washington? - Krull	4th Grade
What Was the Underground Railroad- Mcdonough	4th Grade
Let's Talk About Race- Lester	4th Grade
The List of Things That Will Not Change- Stead	4th Grade
Frederick's Journey: The Life of Fredrick Douglass- Rappaport	4th Grade
Undefeated- Alexander Nelson	4th Grade
Champions of Change: 25 Women Who Made History- Watkins	5th Grade
This Book is Anti-Racist- Jewell	5th Grade
A Place to Land: Martin Luther King Jr. and the Speech That Inspired a Nation- Wittenstien	5th Grade
Pride: The Story of Harvey Milk and the Rainbow Flag- Sanders and Salerno	5th Grade
Equity's Call: The Story of Voting Rights in America	5th Grade
Ghost Boys, Rhodes	6th Grade
Suffragette: The Battle of Equality, Robers	6th Grade

People Who Made History- Prager	
Stamped: Racism, Antiracism and You-Reynolds	6th Grade
Mananaland- Ryan	6th Grade

On Mon, Jan 11, 2021 at 11:36 AM [REDACTED] wrote:

Hi there,

I want to start by saying thank you for emailing me back pertaining to the literature being read in the 3rd grade classrooms and diversity. I would still like to know where exactly in the 3rd grade curriculum it talks about teaching sexual preference and orientation, ie. "Call Me Max" and discussing transgenderism. I know that legally, you are to have my consent before those discussions are had. "Julian is a Mermaid" is great about talking about self expression and that it is okay to be who you are. But Max goes into more detail than Julian as I have read both of the books. The attachments that were forwarded to me are appreciated but I do not see where we need to discuss specifics like this with my child, without my consent. I understand the district's desire to educate on diversity and anti-discrimination and appreciate that. I too feel it is important for my children to grow up with empathy and understanding of those around them. I understand that if this is something that has come up in the classroom or grade and needs to be addressed that yes, it should be, but my issue is that, as a parent, I am not being kept in this loop. When it comes to sexual orientation and preference, I feel that parents need to be made aware of what will be taught prior to that happening, just like we do with the maturation program because there will be discussions had at home and I want to be the one that does so. There needs to be more transparency to all of this. Even if a teacher shuts down a discussion among students at the time the lesson is happening, it is the discussion that happens after, either at recess or at home that we need to know about and be ready for, not blind-sided by like I was this weekend with my son and his questions. I would like to know the list of books in the "Book Boxes" at Horizon. I would also like to know, again, where exactly in the curriculum for 3rd grade it states to teach this specific topic to my child (and saying it is under diversity will not be the blanket answer here, please give me detailed specifics.) I am trying very hard to understand the motive and reasoning behind these actions. Again, I am all for teaching about equality and diversity, but why has this been done without parental knowledge? I know my rights as a parent and I know that legally this is not okay without me consenting. Please help me to understand all of this? I really am trying to grasp the concept here. Again, thank you so much!

--

Vanessa Jobe, Ed.D.

Horizon Elementary Assistant Principal

(she/her/ hers)

801.264.7420

From : "Vanessa Jobe"
To : [REDACTED]
Cc : "Whitney Anderson" , "Jennifer Covington"
Subject : Re: Transparency in the Equity Program

Yes, it is a great idea to have the equity topic announced on teacher's weekly communication. We will work on doing that as a school! We appreciate the support of all of our students and furthering these conversations at home.

On Tue, Jan 12, 2021 at 12:42 PM [REDACTED] wrote:

Thank you for this. Yes, I would love to know if there is something I'm missing as far as communication home from each of my children's teachers. And the last thing I need to know, will there be better disclosure in the future for every other class when these touchy subjects come into play?

On Tue, Jan 12, 2021, 10:32 AM Vanessa Jobe <vjobe@murrayschools.org> wrote:

Hi [REDACTED]
We are so sorry you have lost sleep over this and we greatly appreciate your continued communication. As educators we are always working to see how we can continue to improve our practice and our communication. Ms. Paul still sends out the weekly calendars that you received in the beginning of the year. Do you need help accessing those?

This month's equity theme on second steps was: Handling Name Calling and Equity Issue that pertains to your class. The Max book was specifically needed for an incident in the other class. Max was not needed in your son's class. Those books in particular (Julian is a mermaid and Max) are not listed because they are not in the original equity book bundles. I will add those books to the list as well under "additional resources." We used them due to needed support for current transgender students.

All of the other books we have on LGBTQIA+ or trans student support are listed in our book bundles. You will see our pacing guide with the months to see which equity topics will be taught at which time.

We are proud of the equity work and student support that is happening in our school and district and want you to feel that you also have access to the work. We have many students and families that have felt seen, heard and loved through this work. Thank you for supporting everyone as well.

Let us know if there are further steps we can take to ensure your comfort.

Dr. Jobe

On Tue, Jan 12, 2021 at 9:25 AM [REDACTED] wrote:

Thank you for your response and for the time you have taken to help me and at this point, I prefer to communicate over email so that I have a record of things that were said and can also discuss this with my husband. Thank you for recognizing my comfort, because I have lost a lot of sleep over this whole thing. This is hard for me as I am not one to want to rock the boat but I feel that this needs addressing.

I am aware that "Call Me Max" was not read to my son but that it was read in the other class. I was assuming that he would be hearing it as well, as Ms. Paul is also one of his teachers. I am all for trying to help build awareness and empathy for any situation, but why were parents not informed about this book being read initially? That's where all this goes for me. If they were not informed, what is to stop me not being informed about these specific lessons as well as any other sensitive matters? I have been a teacher and I was always drilled that you stick to the state curriculum and do not deviate without full disclosure to everyone involved in order to protect myself as an educator for incidents just like this. There are other children's books that can discuss these matters, just like "Julian is a Mermaid", that promote self expression and make a great conversation leading into being accepting of others and their preferences without needing to specifically define terms. Anytime sensitive, specific gender-related words or discussions are had with younger students, I feel as a parent, I need to be informed so that I can best support what is happening at the school or be there so it makes my discussion with my child easier. Legally, this is my right as a parent. Again, I understand the intention. I don't know anyone who hasn't had some incident of discrimination, no matter who you are, so I fully am for supporting children. But I also need to know what is going on with my own children, their comfort levels are just as important and believe me, my son was confused initially by what he was hearing from other kids.

I used to get calendars and messages on Parentsquare all the time letting me know the week's plans in each of my children's classes and I was thrilled that this school-home communication was happening, but it has dropped off for awhile now and for me to find anything, I have to log in as my children and search through their classwork or calendars to find this information, if at all. It would be so much easier to have a paper in my hands each week that shows me, again, what is going on. I can't tell you how much I miss that and I know that teachers are overloaded right now and I wish I could bring them lunch and coffee every day because I know how much work goes into this profession. I am also feeling uncomfortable with the fact that the book list you sent me yesterday does not have these 2 books on it but that a list sent to other parents, also yesterday, does have these books listed. I am feeling like, "Are they being fully open with me here?" I promise, all I want is to know about things and with sensitive items that may need further discussion at home, notice of this happening beforehand. Even if it is about something I'm totally cool with, if other parents may find that to be sensitive, disclose it. Being proactive on any matter is so much more appreciated. And if a topic does not fall under the "needing consent" idea but as educators, you feel it may cause problems, address that. Disclose it. All we want as parents is transparency here. Any communication with the school is greatly appreciated. Even if I'm completely overloaded by it, I will still greatly appreciate it because that tells me that I am valued as a parent. Too much is better than none at all and right now, we get nothing about what is going on and we feel like we are floundering.

Again, I really honestly do appreciate the help I have received on this matter. I do not want you to walk away and think that I do not appreciate you. I really truly do. I am grateful for the steps that are being taken to ensure all children feel comfortable and safe at the school and I am grateful you are making sure to follow all regulations. That makes me as a parent feel comfort as well. Thank you for caring about them. I hope you have a wonderful day!

--
Vanessa Jobe, Ed.D.
Horizon Elementary Assistant Principal

From : "Vanessa Jobe"
To : [REDACTED]
Cc : "Whitney Anderson" , "Jennifer Covington"
Subject : Re: Transparency in the Equity Program

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--

Vanessa Jobe, Ed.D.
Horizon Elementary Assistant Principal
(she/her/hers)
801.264.7420

From [REDACTED]
To : "Whitney Anderson"
Subject : Thank you for the letter
Attachment : Equity State.png;

Ms. Anderson,

Thank you for the letter today to parents. I greatly appreciate the honesty in this. I am sorry for the firestorm this has created. But all of the differing information and not knowing which story to believe was just really hard and makes me as a parent feel very powerless. Personally, I was just wanting transparency and to have a heads up on things and now it's blown up. I still have a couple of questions that keep lingering in my mind and maybe you can just help me out.

1. Julian is a Mermaid was on one of the original book bundle lists sent to some parents but the more recent lists I have seen, it is not. I know that on Ms. Paul's January calendar, Julian is a Mermaid is listed as the equity lesson. Was this part of the original bundle or was this also just a separate book? (I did not mind it being read, just wondering where it originated and where it went is all.)

2. Originally, I was sent a state memo from 2017 from Ms. Paul as the reason Call Me Max was read in her homeroom class. I have looked into the Senate bills and the amendments listed and the amendments made on a local level and I still cannot see how this was the reason this could be discussed. Can you offer me some insight that maybe I am missing on this? Or is this not a valid document to excuse this occurrence? I just am looking for clarification on this document. I have attached it below.

For the record, I am not against sensitive topics being taught, as long as I am kept in the know so that I can be supportive here at home. Supportive vs. reactive conversations are always easier and have a better outcome I feel. I know that this was to help empathize with a student and I am all for that but the execution was kind of messy. I know that there are a lot of hard things kids have to deal with and it is important to teach empathy and to help kids have an understanding of others and their lifestyles. I just want to feel a part of my children's education. I constantly am trying to teach and show my kids that we need to be kind and accepting of everyone and hopefully they are. I have also purposely tried to keep them out of all of this craziness as I just want them to be kids. Thank you for all you do. I know it can be a heavy load.

[REDACTED]

From : [REDACTED]
To : wanderson@murrayschools.org
Subject : Third grade transgender conversation
Attachment : image1.jpeg; ATT00002.txt;

[REDACTED] told me they read this book and then discussed it. Thanks for your help with this issue

From : "Whitney Anderson"
To : [REDACTED]
Cc : "Jennifer Covington" , "Vanessa Jobe" , "Darren Dean"
Subject : Re: Transgender Lesson

[REDACTED]

Thank you for reaching out with your concerns. I understand where you are coming from. We are having discussions (school level and district level) and trying to find ways to have more transparency and communication with the books. We have paused our equity work until we can put systems in place to ensure that all stakeholders are informed with the books and lessons that are put in place.

Our plan for the future is to put the book list on our website along with the schedule for when the books will be read in class. If additional books are wanting to be added to the list, we will have them go through a teacher committee and then to our parent committee (School Community Council). If both committees approve the book, they will be added to the website list and parents will be notified of the additional book. If at any time you do not feel that you want your student to participate in any of the topics or books (or any lesson taught in the classroom) you can let the teacher know and they can be excused from that lesson.

If you have additional suggestions or questions with this process, please let me know. We want to work together to find solutions.

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Thank you.
[REDACTED]

From : "Vanessa Jobe"
 To : [REDACTED]
 Cc : "Sarah Paul", "Whitney Anderson", "Jennifer Covington"
 Subject : Re: Transparency in the Equity Program

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-Dr. Jobe

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Second Steps and Equity Themes Schedule:

August	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Safety, Respect and Race
September	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Being Assertive and Language
October	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Empathy, Sexuality & Gender and Understanding Differences
November	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Managing Learning Challenges and Ability
December	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Problem Solving and Class
January	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Handling Name Calling and Equity Issue that pertains to your class.
February	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Black History Month and Being Responsible
March	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Circle back on whichever topic your class could use more support on
April	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Circle back on whichever topic your class could use more support on
May	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Celebrating Cultures

Equity Book List for all Grades:

Book	Grade Level
All Are Welcome- Pengold	Special Education

Little Legends: Exceptional Black Men in History- Harrison	Special Education
Who Was Frederick Douglass- Prince	Special Education
Who Did it first? -Hart	Special Education/ 1st Grade
Black is a Rainbow Color- Joy	Kinder
Be You! -Reynolds	Kinder
Tiger Days: A Book of Feelings- Clark	Kinder
AntiRacist Baby- Kendi	Kinder
You Matter- Robinson	1st Grade
I am Human- Verde/ Reynolds	1st Grade
La princesa and the Pea- Elya	2nd Grade
Ohana Means Family- Loomis	2nd Grade
The Day You Begin- Woodson	2nd Grade
A Family is a Family is a Family- O'Leary	2nd Grade
Of Thee I Sing: A Letter to My Daughters- Obama	3rd Grade
Little Leaders: Bold Women in Black History- Harrison	3rd Grade
Fry Bread: A Native American Family Story- Millard	3rd Grade
The Bell Rang- Ransome	3rd Grade

Book	Grade Level
Word Collector- Reynolds	3rd Grade
Paper Kingdom- Rhee	3rd Grade
The Oldest Student: How Mary Walker Learned to Read- Hubbard	4th Grade
What Was the March on Washington? - Krull	4th Grade
What Was the Underground Railroad- Mcdonough	4th Grade
Let's Talk About Race- Lester	4th Grade
The List of Things That Will Not Change- Stead	4th Grade
Frederick's Journey: The Life of Fredrick Douglass- Rappaport	4th Grade
Undefeated- Alexander Nelson	4th Grade
Champions of Change: 25 Women Who Made History- Watkins	5th Grade
This Book is Anti-Racist- Jewell	5th Grade
A Place to Land: Martin Luther King Jr. and the Speech That Inspired a Nation- Wittenstien	5th Grade
Pride: The Story of Harvey Milk and the Rainbow Flag- Sanders and Salerno	5th Grade
Equity's Call: The Story of Voting Rights in America	5th Grade
Ghost Boys, Rhodes	6th Grade
Suffragette: The Battle of Equality, Robers	6th Grade

People Who Made History- Prager	
Stamped: Racism, Antiracism and You-Reynolds	6th Grade
Mananaland- Ryan	6th Grade

On Mon, Jan 11, 2021 at 11:36 AM [REDACTED] wrote:

Hi there,

I want to start by saying thank you for emailing me back pertaining to the literature being read in the 3rd grade classrooms and diversity. I would still like to know where exactly in the 3rd grade curriculum it talks about teaching sexual preference and orientation, ie. "Call Me Max" and discussing transgenderism. I know that legally, you are to have my consent before those discussions are had. "Julian is a Mermaid" is great about talking about self expression and that it is okay to be who you are. But Max goes into more detail than Julian as I have read both of the books. The attachments that were forwarded to me are appreciated but I do not see where we need to discuss specifics like this with my child, without my consent. I understand the district's desire to educate on diversity and anti-discrimination and appreciate that. I too feel it is important for my children to grow up with empathy and understanding of those around them. I understand that if this is something that has come up in the classroom or grade and needs to be addressed that yes, it should be, but my issue is that, as a parent, I am not being kept in this loop. When it comes to sexual orientation and preference, I feel that parents need to be made aware of what will be taught prior to that happening, just like we do with the maturation program because there will be discussions had at home and I want to be the one that does so. There needs to be more transparency to all of this. Even if a teacher shuts down a discussion among students at the time the lesson is happening, it is the discussion that happens after, either at recess or at home that we need to know about and be ready for, not blind-sided by like I was this weekend with my son and his questions. I would like to know the list of books in the "Book Boxes" at Horizon. I would also like to know, again, where exactly in the curriculum for 3rd grade it states to teach this specific topic to my child (and saying it is under diversity will not be the blanket answer here, please give me detailed specifics.) I am trying very hard to understand the motive and reasoning behind these actions. Again, I am all for teaching about equality and diversity, but why has this been done without parental knowledge? I know my rights as a parent and I know that legally this is not okay without me consenting. Please help me to understand all of this? I really am trying to grasp the concept here. Again, thank you so much!

--

Vanessa Jobe, Ed.D.

Horizon Elementary Assistant Principal

(she/her/ hers)

801.264.7420

From : "Vanessa Jobe"
To : [REDACTED]
Cc : "Whitney Anderson" , "Jennifer Covington"
Subject : Re: Transparency in the Equity Program

Yes, it is a great idea to have the equity topic announced on teacher's weekly communication. We will work on doing that as a school! We appreciate the support of all of our students and furthering these conversations at home.

On Tue, Jan 12, 2021 at 12:42 PM [REDACTED] wrote:

Thank you for this. Yes, I would love to know if there is something I'm missing as far as communication home from each of my children's teachers. And the last thing I need to know, will there be better disclosure in the future for every other class when these touchy subjects come into play?

On Tue, Jan 12, 2021, 10:32 AM Vanessa Jobe <vjobe@murrayschools.org> wrote:

Hi [REDACTED]

We are so sorry you have lost sleep over this and we greatly appreciate your continued communication. As educators we are always working to see how we can continue to improve our practice and our communication. Ms. Paul still sends out the weekly calendars that you received in the beginning of the year. Do you need help accessing those?

This month's equity theme on second steps was: Handling Name Calling and Equity Issue that pertains to your class. The Max book was specifically needed for an incident in the other class. Max was not needed in your son's class. Those books in particular (Julian is a mermaid and Max) are not listed because they are not in the original equity book bundles. I will add those books to the list as well under "additional resources." We used them due to needed support for current transgender students.

All of the other books we have on LGBTQIA+ or trans student support are listed in our book bundles. You will see our pacing guide with the months to see which equity topics will be taught at which time.

We are proud of the equity work and student support that is happening in our school and district and want you to feel that you also have access to the work. We have many students and families that have felt seen, heard and loved through this work. Thank you for supporting everyone as well.

Let us know if there are further steps we can take to ensure your comfort.

Dr. Jobe

On Tue, Jan 12, 2021 at 9:25 AM [REDACTED] wrote:

Thank you for your response and for the time you have taken to help me and at this point, I prefer to communicate over email so that I have a record of things that were said and can also discuss this with my husband. Thank you for recognizing my comfort, because I have lost a lot of sleep over this whole thing. This is hard for me as I am not one to want to rock the boat but I feel that this needs addressing.

I am aware that "Call Me Max" was not read to my son but that it was read in the other class. I was assuming that he would be hearing it as well, as Ms. Paul is also one of his teachers. I am all for trying to help build awareness and empathy for any situation, but why were parents not informed about this book being read initially? That's where all this goes for me. If they were not informed, what is to stop me not being informed about these specific lessons as well as any other sensitive matters? I have been a teacher and I was always drilled that you stick to the state curriculum and do not deviate without full disclosure to everyone involved in order to protect myself as an educator for incidents just like this. There are other children's books that can discuss these matters, just like "Julian is a Mermaid", that promote self expression and make a great conversation leading into being accepting of others and their preferences without needing to specifically define terms. Anytime sensitive, specific gender-related words or discussions are had with younger students, I feel as a parent, I need to be informed so that I can best support what is happening at the school or be there so it makes my discussion with my child easier. Legally, this is my right as a parent. Again, I understand the intention. I don't know anyone who hasn't had some incident of discrimination, no matter who you are, so I fully am for supporting children. But I also need to know what is going on with my own children, their comfort levels are just as important and believe me, my son was confused initially by what he was hearing from other kids.

I used to get calendars and messages on Parentsquare all the time letting me know the week's plans in each of my children's classes and I was thrilled that this school-home communication was happening, but it has dropped off for awhile now and for me to find anything, I have to log in as my children and search through their classwork or calendars to find this information, if at all. It would be so much easier to have a paper in my hands each week that shows me, again, what is going on. I can't tell you how much I miss that and I know that teachers are overloaded right now and I wish I could bring them lunch and coffee every day because I know how much work goes into this profession. I am also feeling uncomfortable with the fact that the book list you sent me yesterday does not have these 2 books on it but that a list sent to other parents, also yesterday, does have these books listed. I am feeling like, "Are they being fully open with me here?" I promise, all I want is to know about things and with sensitive items that may need further discussion at home, notice of this happening beforehand. Even if it is about something I'm totally cool with, if other parents may find that to be sensitive, disclose it. Being proactive on any matter is so much more appreciated. And if a topic does not fall under the "needing consent" idea but as educators, you feel it may cause problems, address that. Disclose it. All we want as parents is transparency here. Any communication with the school is greatly appreciated. Even if I'm completely overloaded by it, I will still greatly appreciate it because that tells me that I am valued as a parent. Too much is better than none at all and right now, we get nothing about what is going on and we feel like we are floundering.

Again, I really honestly do appreciate the help I have received on this matter. I do not want you to walk away and think that I do not appreciate you. I really truly do. I am grateful for the steps that are being taken to ensure all children feel comfortable and safe at the school and I am grateful you are making sure to follow all regulations. That makes me as a parent feel comfort as well. Thank you for caring about them. I hope you have a wonderful day!

--
Vanessa Jobe, Ed.D.
Horizon Elementary Assistant Principal

From : "Vanessa Jobe"
To : [REDACTED]
Cc : Whitney Anderson , "Jennifer Covington"
Subject : Re: Transparency in the Equity Program

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--

Vanessa Jobe, Ed.D.
Horizon Elementary Assistant Principal
(she/her/hers)
801.264.7420

From : [REDACTED]
To : "Whitney Anderson"
Subject : Thank you for the letter
Attachment : Equity State.png;

Ms. Anderson,

Thank you for the letter today to parents. I greatly appreciate the honesty in this. I am sorry for the firestorm this has created. But all of the differing information and not knowing which story to believe was just really hard and makes me as a parent feel very powerless. Personally, I was just wanting transparency and to have a heads up on things and now it's blown up. I still have a couple of questions that keep lingering in my mind and maybe you can just help me out.

1. Julian is a Mermaid was on one of the original book bundle lists sent to some parents but the more recent lists I have seen, it is not. I know that on Ms. Paul's January calendar, Julian is a Mermaid is listed as the equity lesson. Was this part of the original bundle or was this also just a separate book? (I did not mind it being read, just wondering where it originated and where it went is all.)

2. Originally, I was sent a state memo from 2017 from Ms. Paul as the reason Call Me Max was read in her homeroom class. I have looked into the Senate bills and the amendments listed and the amendments made on a local level and I still cannot see how this was the reason this could be discussed. Can you offer me some insight that maybe I am missing on this? Or is this not a valid document to excuse this occurrence? I just am looking for clarification on this document. I have attached it below.

For the record, I am not against sensitive topics being taught, as long as I am kept in the know so that I can be supportive here at home. Supportive vs. reactive conversations are always easier and have a better outcome I feel. I know that this was to help empathize with a student and I am all for that but the execution was kind of messy. I know that there are a lot of hard things kids have to deal with and it is important to teach empathy and to help kids have an understanding of others and their lifestyles. I just want to feel a part of my children's education. I constantly am trying to teach and show my kids that we need to be kind and accepting of everyone and hopefully they are. I have also purposely tried to keep them out of all of this craziness as I just want them to be kids. Thank you for all you do. I know it can be a heavy load.

[REDACTED]

From [REDACTED]
To : wanderson@murrayschools.org, vjobe@murrayschools.org, spaul@murrayschools.org
Subject : Transgender Books

Hello,

My daughter came home from school on Friday and told me all about the "puberty" lesson she had at school. She told me in detail about the books that were read last week, "Call Me Max" and "Julian the Mermaid". She also told me she learned from her teacher that when people grow up they can take special medicine to grow or not grow a beard if they really feel on the inside they're supposed to be a boy or a girl. My husband and I are very upset that these things were taught to our child without our permission. I have been in contact with several parents with children in these two classes who are equally upset. We would like to know why this information is being taught without our permission or without being informed first. Is this information new to the third grade curriculum?

[REDACTED]

From : [REDACTED]
To : "Whitney Anderson" , "spaul@murrayschools.org" , "mluna@murrayschools.org"
Subject : Transgender discussions 3rd grade DLI

Hi there-

It was brought to my attention this weekend by another parent whose child is in the 3rd grade DLI program that a couple of books on transgender topics have been read and discussed in Ms. Paul's class. I believe these books are "Julian is a Mermaid" and "Call Me Max". I was also told that the students discussed and asked questions about transgender ideas, and the question was asked about how the transgender male grew a beard (in Call Me Max), so Ms. Paul explained that people can take medication to grow a beard or not grow a beard, if they want to change their gender. I'm just paraphrasing what I heard through the grapevine, so if I'm wrong on any of these details, feel free to correct me.

I'm concerned that these books are being read and these discussions are taking place without parents' knowledge. (I heard from several other moms in the class and it was a surprise to each one.) I was aware that our students were reading books about diversity and equality, and I think those are important topics and discussions, and I'm grateful that you teachers are taking them on and helping our kids learn to be kind and accepting of others, no matter our differences. However, I did not realize that these books and discussions would also include LGBTQ+ issues, and I feel that's something that parents should be formally informed about before it happens. I do realize LGBTQ+ issues are important, and I want my son and all my children to be informed, aware, kind and accepting. I am just concerned that topics which involve sexuality are more sensitive, especially for children this young. These are topics I would like to address with my son, and I want to be fully aware of what is being said about them in his classroom, so that I can be involved in the discussion with him and be there to answer his questions and help him understand these issues.

As I've thought about this over the weekend, the ideas I've had is that I would like to have a formal list of all the diversity books being read to our students and the topics these books cover, as well as a basic time frame of when they will be read and discussed. I would like if parents had a form to sign, stating we are aware of what gender/sexuality books and topics will be addressed, so every parent is consciously on board with the program. I would also like to have the option to attend (via zoom or in-person) these discussions, especially on topics that veer into sensitive and/or sexuality issues. That way we, as parents, can be better aware of what is being talked about and more prepared to address these topics with our children when they come home from school. Would these ideas be doable? Please let me know your thoughts.

As always, thank you for all you do for our children. I know all of you teachers work tirelessly, and I appreciate it so much. Thank you also for listening to my concerns as a parent. I look forward to hearing from you.

[REDACTED]

From [REDACTED]
To : "Whitney Anderson", "Vanessa Jobe", "Sarah Paul", "mluna@murrayschools.org"
Cc : "Jennifer Covington"
Subject : Transgender discussions at Horizon 3rd grade

Dr. Jobe,

Thank you for getting back to me about this and answering some of the questions I asked. I appreciate the additional information I've received here, and yes, I would like to be able to zoom in or attend in-person during the equity book readings and discussions, so thank you for offering that option from now on. Please let me know how I can get a link to that every week. Or if Ms. Paul could let me know before the next Second Steps lesson, that would be great. I would also like the option offered to every parent in the class, and I believe that option should be available to every parent in every class from now on, especially pertaining to topics that may be sensitive to their children.

I still have a few concerns I would like addressed. In talking with other parents (which discussions have furthered my concerns greatly), I have learned that the comprehensive list you sent me here (which includes "Call Me Max" as one of the books for the 3rd grade Second Steps program) is different from lists that were sent to other parents. That's confusing to me and them. Another parent whose child is in the exact same class as my child was sent a list that did not include "Call Me Max" on it. Why is that? How is it possible that my child's class was going to read that book (as you explicitly listed here) but her child's class was not (as you explicitly told her), when they are in the exact same class? Please clarify this discrepancy.

I noticed on the monthly schedule you sent here, there are several months with open topics (January: Equity issue that pertains to your class, March: Circle back on whichever topic your class could use more support on, April: Circle back on whichever topic your class could use more support on). I think it's great to have some flexibility with the program, however, as a parent I would like and expect more concrete details BEFORE the month of these open topics. Now that I'm aware that this program includes such sensitive topics for young children, I want to be fully aware IN ADVANCE of what will be read and discussed, and I would like to be informed on a regular basis (monthly, if not weekly). And as I mentioned before (and in accordance with Utah law, code § 53E-9-203), I expect a paper to be sent home beforehand that parents will sign any time a sexuality or gender identity subject will be addressed. I think this will be a great benefit to parents feeling informed, and to administrators and teachers as well, since that way there shouldn't be any big surprises like what has happened this past week in Ms. Paul's class.

Overall, as I've considered this situation, I feel that the biggest problem is a lack of transparency with the Second Steps program. From the beginning of the school year, I knew students would be reading books about social equity, and I saw several pictures of books about racism, etc. I was glad to know that my children would be learning about such important topics. However, I was not informed at any time that my children would be learning about anything pertaining to gender or sexual identity. I have since found out that these books (Call Me Max, Julian is a Mermaid) were not even included in the list, because they were part of "additional resources," which was a list NO PARENT RECEIVED. So how could any parents have even been aware that this book (or others with similar sensitive content) might have been read to their children? As a parent this is completely unacceptable to me. I think that, regardless of any possible differences in personal opinions, we can agree that these are incredibly sensitive topics, ESPECIALLY for children. It is simply unacceptable to me that this topic or anything of similar sensitivity would be discussed in any setting with my child without my explicit knowledge and approval. For that reason, I want way more transparency with this program. I want a comprehensive list of EVERY single book (including "additional resources" and ANY others not on the regular list) approved for my children's classrooms. I would like to know each week what books will be read and topics discussed. I want a paper sent home to be signed and approved for any topic regarding any form of gender identity or sexuality. And as I said previously, I want the ability to attend the reading and discussion myself of all of the books associated with this program or any other books/discussions of similar sensitivity.

My final concern, for now, is that I was informed that this book (Call Me Max) was read to the 3rd grade, without parental knowledge, approval or consent, because there was apparently a student in 3rd grade dealing with those issues. I would like to understand the protocol behind that decision. How was it deemed necessary that this book be read to the class? Did teachers decide that the student needed transgender support? Did the parents of this child decide that, or were the parents informed about this decision? Clearly I do not need to know nor do I want to know the details on this 3rd grade student in particular. But I do need to know the protocol for how these decisions are made and how parents are informed when those decisions are made, because if the day comes that this decision is made for one of my children, I want to know exactly how it is done. I would expect to be involved in that decision, should it ever come up. Every parent deserves complete transparency for that process as well, and I would like a PDF or some form of exact protocol for how those decisions are made by staff, especially regarding gender or sexual identity. If there is no exact protocol, then I find this very problematic, and I think it needs to be addressed at a higher level, and I will be taking it to a higher level if this is not addressed here.

I understand that these equity books were read in reference to bullying, and I read the document attached to Ms. Paul's email. I am all for addressing bullying where that happens, but when gender identity and sexuality is involved in the discussion and book topics, teachers and administrators are legally bound to inform parents, and I expect that information, with a written consent form, in advance from now on, in every case.

I think we can clearly agree that topics of gender identity and sexuality require extreme sensitivity with children. And I think we can also agree that this is a very sensitive topic and discussion for most parents and children, regardless of differing personal opinions. That being said, I'm sure you can understand why I want to be 100% aware and involved in those topics and discussions with my children. To be frank, I feel violated and lied to that these discussions took place in my child's classroom without any parental acknowledgement or consent. I have looked up the laws and I know that legal parental rights have been violated in this situation: In accordance with the parameters stated in Utah law (Utah code § 53E-9-203) "sexual behavior, orientation, or attitudes" (1c) are not to be addressed in the curriculum of children in the state of Utah without written parental consent. I will be pursuing this further if I feel that the transparency on this program and these issues is not corrected.

As I stated in my first email, I am all for the support of diversity in ALL its forms, and I WANT my children to learn about and be accepting and kind to everyone. This is very important to me as a parent, and I speak openly about this with my children every single day. If my child's teacher, and you as administrators of this program, had simply come to me in full transparency and honesty, I believe this would have been a non-issue. I would have stated my desires to be involved, and I assume those desires would have been granted, and I would have handled the discussion with my child at home accordingly. But because of how it was done in what felt like a secretive fashion, I now feel distrustful and will be hyper vigilant. I hope this lack of trust can be repaired, because I have always believed and still do believe that you are good teachers and administrators who want the best for my children and all students at Horizon.

I look forward to your response.

Thank you.

[REDACTED]

On Monday, January 11, 2021, 08:39:36 AM MST, Vanessa Jobe <vjobe@murrayschools.org> wrote:

H [REDACTED]

Thank you for reaching out with your concern. We appreciate all that you do for your child at Horizon and we appreciate your questions.

Ms. Paul teaches second steps and equity work once a week on Wednesdays. You are welcome to zoom in if you would like. The lessons are wonderful and developmentally appropriate. If we film them more often our online students will also have the opportunity to view the lessons. Let us know if this is something you would be interested in.

I have included a schedule of the equity work and second steps below along with the equity books that will be used this year.

September	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being Assertive and Language
October	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Empathy, Sexuality & Gender and Understanding Differences
November	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Managing Learning Challenges and Ability
December	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Problem Solving and Class
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April	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Circle back on whichever topic your class could use more support on
May	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Celebrating Cultures

Here is a comprehensive list of the books that 3rd grade reads during their second steps lessons.

Julian is a Mermaid: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E44ziYvxnWg>

Call me Max: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=icrPnaCbKrY>

Fry Bread: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tWdEz0ptvbc>

The Bell Rang: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vwbtrVy48qw>

Of thee I sing: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ldCuEB8gohI>

Little Leaders: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ugjITietvsU&t=378s>

Enemy Pie: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FTM8Cccl1xs>

Thank you,
Dr. Jobe

--
Vanessa Jobe, Ed.D.
Horizon Elementary Assistant Principal
(she/her/hers)
801.264.7420

From : [REDACTED]
To : Jcovington@murrayschools.org, vjobe@murrayschools.org, wanderson@murrayschools.org, ddean@murrayschools.org
Subject : Transgender Lesson

Hello,

I would just like to express my concern for the equity lesson that was taught to my 8 year old daughter without my permission. In class the book "Call me Max" was read to the students and the students learned about the author who is now a man. They were curious as to how he was able to grow a beard when he was once a girl. The students were taught that when they are older they can take medicine to grow or not grow a beard if they really feel like a boy or a girl on the inside. How confusing is that for an eight year old?!? I understand times are changing, but I do not understand how it is ok for this information to be taught in class without giving the parents a heads up. The maturation program requires parent permission, why not this lesson? This is something I would have liked to teach my child when I felt the time was right and in my own way. I understand these lessons are intended to teach students confidence in themselves and in accepting others, I do not believe that that book needed to be shared in order to do that.

I have been in contact with my daughter's teacher and she has done a great job explaining her reasoning. It sounds like she has just been following the district's guidelines on equity. I still do not agree with these lessons being taught in the classroom and I know there are other parents who have the same concerns. Are there any changes that can be made? More transparency with the curriculum?

Thank you.

[REDACTED]

From : [REDACTED]
To : spaul@murrayschools.org, vjobe@murrayschools.org, "Whitney Anderson"
Cc : jcovington@murrayschools.org
Subject : Transparency in the Equity Program

Hi there,

I want to start by saying thank you for emailing me back pertaining to the literature being read in the 3rd grade classrooms and diversity. I would still like to know where exactly in the 3rd grade curriculum it talks about teaching sexual preference and orientation, ie. "Call Me Max" and discussing transgenderism. I know that legally, you are to have my consent before those discussions are had. "Julian is a Mermaid" is great about talking about self expression and that it is okay to be who you are. But Max goes into more detail than Julian as I have read both of the books. The attachments that were forwarded to me are appreciated but I do not see where we need to discuss specifics like this with my child, without my consent. I understand the district's desire to educate on diversity and anti-discrimination and appreciate that. I too feel it is important for my children to grow up with empathy and understanding of those around them. I understand that if this is something that has come up in the classroom or grade and needs to be addressed that yes, it should be, but my issue is that, as a parent, I am not being kept in this loop. When it comes to sexual orientation and preference, I feel that parents need to be made aware of what will be taught prior to that happening, just like we do with the maturation program because there will be discussions had at home and I want to be the one that does so. There needs to be more transparency to all of this. Even if a teacher shuts down a discussion among students at the time the lesson is happening, it is the discussion that happens after, either at recess or at home that we need to know about and be ready for, not blind-sided by like I was this weekend with my son and his questions. I would like to know the list of books in the "Book Boxes" at Horizon. I would also like to know, again, where exactly in the curriculum for 3rd grade it states to teach this specific topic to my child (and saying it is under diversity will not be the blanket answer here, please give me detailed specifics.) I am trying very hard to understand the motive and reasoning behind these actions. Again, I am all for teaching about equality and diversity, but why has this been done without parental knowledge? I know my rights as a parent and I know that legally this is not okay without me consenting. Please help me to understand all of this? I really am trying to grasp the concept here. Again, thank you so much!

From : [REDACTED]
To : "Whitney Anderson", vjobe@murrayschools.org
Cc : jcovington@murrayschools.org
Subject : Transparency in the Equity Program

Thank you for your response and for the time you have taken to help me and at this point, I prefer to communicate over email so that I have a record of things that were said and can also discuss this with my husband. Thank you for recognizing my comfort, because I have lost a lot of sleep over this whole thing. This is hard for me as I am not one to want to rock the boat but I feel that this needs addressing.

I am aware that "Call Me Max" was not read to my son but that it was read in the other class. I was assuming that he would be hearing it as well, as Ms. Paul is also one of his teachers. I am all for trying to help build awareness and empathy for any situation, but why were parents not informed about this book being read initially? That's where all this goes for me. If they were not informed, what is to stop me not being informed about these specific lessons as well as any other sensitive matters? I have been a teacher and I was always drilled that you stick to the state curriculum and do not deviate without full disclosure to everyone involved in order to protect myself as an educator for incidents just like this. There are other children's books that can discuss these matters, just like "Julian is a Mermaid", that promote self expression and make a great conversation leading into being accepting of others and their preferences without needing to specifically define terms. Anytime sensitive, specific gender-related words or discussions are had with younger students, I feel as a parent, I need to be informed so that I can best support what is happening at the school or be there so it makes my discussion with my child easier. Legally, this is my right as a parent. Again, I understand the intention. I don't know anyone who hasn't had some incident of discrimination, no matter who you are, so I fully am for supporting children. But I also need to know what is going on with my own children, their comfort levels are just as important and believe me, my son was confused initially by what he was hearing from other kids.

I used to get calendars and messages on Parentsquare all the time letting me know the week's plans in each of my children's classes and I was thrilled that this school-home communication was happening, but it has dropped off for awhile now and for me to find anything, I have to log in as my children and search through their classwork or calendars to find this information, if at all. It would be so much easier to have a paper in my hands each week that shows me, again, what is going on. I can't tell you how much I miss that and I know that teachers are overloaded right now and I wish I could bring them lunch and coffee every day because I know how much work goes into this profession. I am also feeling uncomfortable with the fact that the book list you sent me yesterday does not have these 2 books on it but that a list sent to other parents, also yesterday, does have these books listed. I am feeling like, "Are they being fully open with me here?" I promise, all I want is to know about things and with sensitive items that may need further discussion at home, notice of this happening beforehand. Even if it is about something I'm totally cool with, if other parents may find that to be sensitive, disclose it. Being proactive on any matter is so much more appreciated. And if a topic does not fall under the "needing consent" idea but as educators, you feel it may cause problems, address that. Disclose it. All we want as parents is transparency here. Any communication with the school is greatly appreciated. Even if I'm completely overloaded by it, I will still greatly appreciate it because that tells me that I am valued as a parent. Too much is better than none at all and right now, we get nothing about what is going on and we feel like we are floundering.

Again, I really honestly do appreciate the help I have received on this matter. I do not want you to walk away and think that I do not appreciate you. I really truly do. I am grateful for the steps that are being taken to ensure all children feel comfortable and safe at the school and I am grateful you are making sure to follow all regulations. That makes me as a parent feel comfort as well. Thank you for caring about them. I hope you have a wonderful day!

[REDACTED]

From : [REDACTED]
To : "Vanessa Jobe", "Whitney Anderson"
Cc : jcovington@murrayschools.org
Subject : Transparency in the Equity Program

Thank you for this. Yes, I would love to know if there is something I'm missing as far as communication home from each of my children's teachers. And the last thing I need to know, will there be better disclosure in the future for every other class when these touchy subjects come into play?

[REDACTED]
On Tue, Jan 12, 2021, 10:32 AM Vanessa Jobe <vjobe@murrayschools.org> wrote:

Hi [REDACTED]

We are so sorry you have lost sleep over this and we greatly appreciate your continued communication. As educators we are always working to see how we can continue to improve our practice and our communication. Ms. Paul still sends out the weekly calendars that you received in the beginning of the year. Do you need help accessing those?

This month's equity theme on second steps was: Handling Name Calling and Equity Issue that pertains to your class. The Max book was specifically needed for an incident in the other class. Max was not needed in your son's class. Those books in particular (Julian is a mermaid and Max) are not listed because they are not in the original equity book bundles. I will add those books to the list as well under "additional resources." We used them due to needed support for current transgender students.

All of the other books we have on LGBTQIA+ or trans student support are listed in our book bundles. You will see our pacing guide with the months to see which equity topics will be taught at which time.

We are proud of the equity work and student support that is happening in our school and district and want you to feel that you also have access to the work. We have many students and families that have felt seen, heard and loved through this work. Thank you for supporting everyone as well.

Let us know if there are further steps we can take to ensure your comfort.

Dr. Jobe

On Tue, Jan 12, 2021 at 9:25 AM [REDACTED] wrote:

Thank you for your response and for the time you have taken to help me and at this point, I prefer to communicate over email so that I have a record of things that were said and can also discuss this with my husband. Thank you for recognizing my comfort, because I have lost a lot of sleep over this whole thing. This is hard for me as I am not one to want to rock the boat but I feel that this needs addressing. I am aware that "Call Me Max" was not read to my son but that it was read in the other class. I was assuming that he would be hearing it as well, as Ms. Paul is also one of his teachers. I am all for trying to help build awareness and empathy for any situation, but why were parents not informed about this book being read initially? That's where all this goes for me. If they were not informed, what is to stop me not being informed about these specific lessons as well as any other sensitive matters? I have been a teacher and I was always drilled that you stick to the state curriculum and do not deviate without full disclosure to everyone involved in order to protect myself as an educator for incidents just like this. There are other children's books that can discuss these matters, just like "Julian is a Mermaid", that promote self expression and make a great conversation leading into being accepting of others and their preferences without needing to specifically define terms. Anytime sensitive, specific gender-related words or discussions are had with younger students, I feel as a parent, I need to be informed so that I can best support what is happening at the school or be there so it makes my discussion with my child easier. Legally, this is my right as a parent. Again, I understand the intention. I don't know anyone who hasn't had some incident of discrimination, no matter who you are, so I fully am for supporting children. But I also need to know what is going on with my own children, their comfort levels are just as important and believe me, my son was confused initially by what he was hearing from other kids. I used to get calendars and messages on Parentsquare all the time letting me know the week's plans in each of my children's classes and I was thrilled that this school-home communication was happening, but it has dropped off for awhile now and for me to find anything, I have to log in as my children and search through their classwork or calendars to find this information, if at all. It would be so much easier to have a paper in my hands each week that shows me, again, what is going on. I can't tell you how much I miss that and I know that teachers are overloaded right now and I wish I could bring them lunch and coffee every day because I know how much work goes into this profession. I am also feeling uncomfortable with the fact that the book list you sent me yesterday does not have these 2 books on it but that a list sent to other parents, also yesterday, does have these books listed. I am feeling like, "Are they being fully open with me here?" I promise, all I want is to know about things and with sensitive items that may need further discussion at home, notice of this happening beforehand. Even if it is about something I'm totally cool with, if other parents may find that to be sensitive, disclose it. Being proactive on any matter is so much more appreciated. And if a topic does not fall under the "needing consent" idea but as educators, you feel it may cause problems, address that. Disclose it. All we want as parents is transparency here. Any communication with the school is greatly appreciated. Even if I'm completely overloaded by it, I will still greatly appreciate it because that tells me that I am valued as a parent. Too much is better than none at all and right now, we get nothing about what is going on and we feel like we are floundering. Again, I really honestly do appreciate the help I have received on this matter. I do not want you to walk away and think that I do not appreciate you. I really truly do. I am grateful for the steps that are being taken to ensure all children feel comfortable and safe at the school and I am grateful you are making sure to follow all regulations. That makes me as a parent feel comfort as well. Thank you for caring about them. I hope you have a wonderful day!

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