

## **“I just want to teach”**

**January 24, 2023**

### **To North Dakota Legislators:**

This memorandum to you is regarding pending legislation in the areas of primary and secondary education. At the end of last May I finished teaching, most of it in North Dakota with the last 21 years in Devils Lake. For the last decade in teaching, I with fellow educators have experienced significant, intermittent, but relentless efforts to inculcate gender and critical race theories into both curriculum and teaching.

Much of what I have experienced I believe would apply to other educators and school systems across our state. I could go into detail about that experience of what has originated from individuals and organizations outside North Dakota and in turn has been pushed by a very small number of individuals in school systems here. In total, that experience personally has been extensive and an attempt to relate it could fill a book.

For practical purposes, what I am providing here is a chronology of what transpired (as much as possible) with brief commentary. My hope is my personal experience provides at least an overview of values being pushed that I believe most North Dakotans recognize as dangerous. Those values are dangerous because they undermine and seek to replace the foundational role of families in forming identity and personhood, as well as create division in relationships, by emphasizing differences by separating individuals into fragmented groups rather than uniting them through our shared humanity (we all bleed red under the skin).

### **Fall 2012**

A current events discussion in class over gay marriage in the presidential campaign heated up and ended in disruptive comments. Before I ended it, a student told another student he would burn in hell for his views supporting gay marriage. Because he made his comments personal toward the other student, which disrupted class, I spoke with the student after class. I didn't believe he understood that he had crossed a boundary, so I consulted administration and asked that the student not be allowed back into class until he wrote a reflection letter on civil discourse. The student remained out of class for two school days and was readmitted when he submitted his letter.

*I have spent considerable time reflecting on my actions regarding the free flow of ideas in a social studies classroom. I believe now I made a mistake in what amounted to censoring a student for expressing his beliefs through his right to free speech. Looking back at that situation, I would have asked but not insisted for both students to write reflections on the importance of civil discourse in a representative democracy.*

### **Fall 2013 - Spring 2014**

In 2013, a former DLHS college student conducted a survey on student attitudes about LGBTQ... in our high school. He used the results of his survey and the incident between the 2 unnamed students in my

classroom in a letter to local and regional newspapers as evidence of intolerance and stated the teacher did nothing about it. Wrong – significant action was taken. Fact: after compiling the study, the college student spent days making the rounds of the high school and spent significant time with staff attempting to garner support for a LGBTQ... training initiative and sex ed program for DLPS, but he never bothered to have a word of conversation with me at any time, either on what happened between the two students or what I thought about his initiative. I first learned of his initiative when I heard students discussing it, after they had taken his LGBTQ... survey in English class.

Although I asked supervisory personnel in the district promoting the study for a look at it to review its design to try to determine the validity of the study, I was told it was only a few questions that English teachers asked juniors and seniors and not much was known beyond that. When I asked English teachers to see the actual questions, the questions in the survey had been taken down on Survey Monkey.

Faculty were never provided with the study, but in the following weeks we were informed that the study had shown that prejudice, ignorance, insensitivity, etc. were serious problems in our school and a proposal was made that encouraged staff collectively to endorse a proposal where all staff would participate in required workshops to receive sensitivity training in this area and upon conclusion of our training we could decide or not, to placard our classrooms designating us as LGBTQ... allies and our rooms as safe spaces in the school environment. Staff training would begin at the high school and eventually by degree be extended down through the grades to include the entire school district. After further consideration in high school staff meetings, the proposal was dropped when some faculty objected to the need and especially the appropriateness of the school intervening in promoting institutional ideation to children of the most intimate nature of the human person. Some of us pushed back then against state power (here through the school) inculcating values that across all cultures and time are recognized as the province of family and the responsibility of parents as the first and most important teachers of their children.

In this initiative, parents were not much of a consideration to the college student and those who joined him. Most of what happened at the high school to garner support for his initiative was not transparent to parents at the time. They were not informed in any significant way regarding what was planned to promote LGBTQ... training at DLHS and the obvious sex-ed that would be needed to implement its goals in the future. If rolled out as planned, the training would be a *fait accompli* directed at their children by the time they were consulted after the fact.

Likewise, the superintendent did not seem to know initially when he approved a study on high school attitudes what the college student would survey and what he planned to use it for. When he did become aware, he did take a firm stand that the LGBTQ... training initiative would not be incorporated in the school system.

Training, What If:

And if the LGBTQ... training initiative had been approved for Devils Lake Public School staff who did the promoters line up to be the trainers? Again, their identity was not transparent. I only learned many weeks after the initiative was being promoted from materials posted online by the college student that the trainers would be members or associated with the Women's Study Department from UND. This proposal was problematic to state the least. Who are the experts? What do those academics in their area of expertise of 3

<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> wave feminism know, or even child development academics know and apply compared to teachers of adolescents, many of them parents?

Most significantly, what entitles those proposed trainers to displace parents in inculcating and passing on the most intimate and primary of values regarding personhood and family? This lack of transparency and lack of understanding of the rights of parents to pass on their values is insulting.

#### **Fall 2014**

The college student followed up by asserting his study proved prejudice at DLHS and used it to promote a panel comprised of LGBTQ... education supporters discussing the need for gender studies for the Devils Lake Public School District at the Devils Lake Public Library. The event was covered by the GF Herald and DL Journal. As a result of the publicity he generated, approximately 40 people crowded into a library meeting room. Among those gathered were some school board members, the school superintendent, the panel, a few local citizens, a few students and teachers, a couple reporters and a few individuals from outside the Devils Lake community. The panel and Q and A that followed generated further reporting in local media.

I did not challenge the college student factually on his misrepresentation regarding what happened in my classroom through the media or at the public forum for an obvious reason – these students were minors – and public attention directed at them was not appropriate. Also, the way the college student had framed the story, pushing back then could likely have blown up in controversy and possibly caused a major disruption for our school and community.

*Design is critical in studies. How questions are framed and who carries out the study generates results. In society, a level of prejudice exists across all humanity – against - minorities, majorities, disabled, all economic classes, all body types and shapes, all academic groups, etc., essentially at some level against everyone. It is and will be part of the human condition. I could formulate questions for DLHS that demonstrate that prejudice exists against any group. That said, my experience at DLHS of relations between and among students and staff from diverse backgrounds was generally very positive in the thousands of daily interactions. Of course, there were and always will be isolated exceptions. I am proud of DLHS, its students and staff, and in my extended time there how people in that school community value and continue to grow in relations with each other.*

Administration dropped its initiative that was promoted by the former DLHS student. The school district through the school board and superintendent went further in responding to the initiative by going on record that the school district would not support introducing LGBTQ... training or curriculum.

#### **January 2015**

Throughout the several month period that included the survey, staff meetings, and the panel discussed above, no letters to the editor to the Devils Lake Journal were generated and I was told by the school superintendent he had received only one neutral phone call from the local community seeking further information. Nevertheless, the superintendent did find an LGBTQ... presenter as an option for educators, a member of the Fargo School District staff. This individual provided one of four 2-3-hour, optional breakout sessions at the January 2015 regional educators' in-service at LRSC. I arrived 2-3 minutes late to that session after mistakenly sticking my head in the other 3 sessions including the headliner's in the auditorium. Of the 300 or so educators attending the in-service, the LGBTQ... session was by far the least attended with only about 20 attendees, among whom I recognized an art teacher, a couple

counselors, the superintendent, a ROTC instructor, and myself from our school district. Several of the other participants seemed to be counselors from neighboring school districts.

The Fargo presenter, at the outset of her session, stated her mission to us was not only toleration of LGBTQ... but acceptance – i.e., we, students, the public, it seemed to me from her presentation all needed to group-think as she thinks. The innate dignity and respect for every individual who walks through a school door is paramount. But acceptance of everyone’s shared humanity cannot mean forced affirmation, imposed on educators, using them to promote the acceptance of behaviors and medical procedures that in many cases becomes damaging and destructive. What becomes totalitarianism of mind control found voice as well from one individual’s Q and A comment during the earlier panel discussion at the library. His comment in summary: we need to get to the children while they are young before their parents can get to them.

*There is a dangerous irony here that escapes the consciousness of promoters of totalitarian ideology. Forcing acceptance of LGBTQ... - violating parents’, their children’s, educators’, and citizens’ freedom of conscience, thought, and religion – becomes intolerance of their values – exactly the opposite of the tolerance of others they supposedly champion. Thus, the endgame of LGBTQ... – to realize the acceptance of LGBTQ... – cannot stop with the sensitivity training of staff at DLHS – it means imposing their ideology on everyone. This is where the schools come in. In their social engineering, totalitarian movements have always targeted the influences most in their way – the family, school, religion.*

For Devils Lake Public Schools, it would have meant comprehensive K-12 sex-education. And unlike even 2014, we now know what that means even by grade-level; because the LGBTQ... movement has succeeded in a short time in some states to enact laws or co-opt state departments of education into incorporating their values into school curriculum, where all students are opted-in as a default rather than the opposite or even sometimes without an opt-out provision for parents and their children.

Just a few of countless examples:

California: drag-queen reading hours for preschoolers

Vermont: beginning in 2021 will require schools to make condoms available to middle and high school students

Massachusetts: Planned Parenthood curriculum incorporated into schools by visiting “educators”

Idaho and Montana: states challenged to allow biological boys and men identifying as girls and women to compete with women in sports

Minnesota: the state education department, in its school “Transformation Toolkit,” issued many directives such as pressuring schools to allow transgender students to use locker rooms of choice regardless if they had not begun to physically transition; and pushing best practices such as – schools should address students as “students” and “scholars” as opposed to “boys and girls” (when issued in 2017, school administrators in northwest Minnesota declined when asked to comment on Grand Forks WDAZ TV news broadcast).

*My point in this part of this letter - there is virtually no interest from educators, the public, and most importantly parents in our school district for imposing this activist ideology on our children. Most understand from their own role as parents and experience as family members that it’s not the job of the*

*state (here using schools) to impose an outside ideology on values that should be nurtured by family.*

### **Fall 2015**

NDSU sent me a standard on-line exit survey as I was concluding graduate studies that directly related to my teaching area. Questions ran the gamut from how well I was prepared in my study area to how I viewed my personal treatment in both the program and on campus. In the preliminary questions, 3-4 transexual identifiers options were provided to check-off in addition to male and female for a total of 5-6 personal identifiers.

*My graduate experience at NDSU was outstanding, which I conveyed in my responses. Besides filling out the questionnaire, I replied in a separate commentary that I resented the designers of the survey having me affirm their new view of humanity by the sheer fact of participating in their survey, adding identifiers through recently invented language that attempt to change timeless understanding of humanity. In fairness to a substantial segment of students' views of personhood of those attending NDSU, an alternate survey should be provided designating only male and female as identifiers as well, or just dispense with any identifier other than a name.*

### **2015 School Year**

During a school day, break-out session, sophomores were addressed by a health professional who in discussing sexual activity emphasized to students that if they were going to engage in sex, they should use birth control. I was assigned as an observer to this session. I was not briefed ahead of time that I had a role to play other than to be present as a regular classroom teacher.

*Personally, I have the highest regard for this health professional, but I felt she had no right to pre-empt the right of parents to direct their children in matters of engaging in sexual relations. Further, as a father and working with high school students daily, I believe strongly that high school students are not ready to deal with the emotional, psychological, material, physical, and spiritual costs of sexual relations. The well-meaning advice of the health professional could, in my opinion, support normalizing for students high-risk behavior with life-long consequences.*

### **Summer 2019**

For the past several summers Planned Parenthood, under the credit-granting authority of a few North Dakota institutions of higher education, has presented workshops titled SAFE SPACES for teachers directed at their implementing Planned Parenthood's vision of sexual and gender education into schools (see course objectives below). I attended Planned Parenthood's workshop in Dickinson June 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> 2019. Over the two days, the workshop was divided into segments focusing on topics relating to child and adolescent development. In passing, in a couple instances, the presenters gave lip service in remarking that parents are the primary educators of sexual education, but otherwise almost never spoke to that primary role. They stated as well at one point during the workshop that the majority of parents want comprehensive sex education. Besides assertions, teacher participants were also sometimes cited statistics, but we were not provided accompanying copies of those studies to review for origin, population, framing, facilitators, or other possible biases. Here are representative examples of sample workshop segments that were presented that I found especially objectionable and being outside the bounds for teachers to provide in public school settings:

1. Qs and As on Values Education as an educator from the workshop - Presenters suggested that

some challenging questions to expect for teachers and responses in dealing with youth in discussing sex-ed were the following: "What is the right age to have sex for the first time?" "People come to their own decisions, there is no right or wrong age." "All my friends have sex, but I don't, how can I be part of the conversation?" "I don't want to have sex yet." "Does sex hurt the first time?" "What does it mean for someone to go down on you?"

*Do parents in ND want teachers to explore these topics with their children? In my school, I have the highest regard for teachers of math, English, science, etc. educating in their subject area, but I would not let some of them guide my child to tie shoes or hold hands to cross the street in the world of forming sexual identity or personhood, nor would I expect them to trust my values in doing the same with their children. During discussion in this segment, a young mother came nearly to tears as she related her loss that came when educators took it upon themselves to describe how life begins to her little girl. She had anticipated and treasured that lost opportunity to explain that conjugal love resulted in her daughter's birth. The presenters had no supportive response for that mother except interminable silence that settled upon the conference room.*

2. Planned Parenthood promoted the Lark program in CO which involved the distribution of condoms to middle school and high school students in public schools. The presenters cited statistics that the program lowered pregnancies and abortions, but the ND Century Code prevents condom distribution in public schools.

*Two reactions: 1. Let participants examine the study in detail for validity. 2. But so what - high school students are not prepared to engage in life-long serious consequences of engaging in sex and parents should not be deprived of the right to parent by school personnel. 2. An aside - how does anyone know for sure the numbers of pregnancies and abortions - some states do not publicly divulge these statistics and many of the chemical abortions result from mail order sources.*

3. Healthy Masculinity segment explored why men are violent or aggressive - Toxic Masculinity. Participants (there were around 15 women and 2 men in the workshop) engaged in activities identifying what it was to be a Man or not be a Man.

*This segment was disappointing and misleading. The set-up included, besides presenters reviewing a litany of descriptors for male toxicity, a long video of minority men interviewed in prison identifying the toxic behavior of their absentee fathers for the reason for their incarceration. After that, the man or not a man activity degenerated into stereotypes and derision of men by some of the women in the workshop with a lone female voice raising a faint defense of men. I thought, really, this is about your fathers, husbands, brothers, and sons. A fatal weakness of the workshop and another reason why Planned Parenthood should never be advising sex ed in ND schools is because nowhere in 2 days was there any mention or accounting for family breakdown or absence of family as an extremely important reason for poor adolescent*

*decision making regardless of the origin or degree of sex or gender education. This segment did not address family breakdown or the reasons for the absence of parents, nor did it discuss female toxicity beyond mentioning girls use manipulative behavior aggressively. Why is there a women's prison in New England? Why is North Dakota government discussing plans for another women's prison?*

Following is the actual course description for Planned Parenthood's Teacher Professional Development Workshop:

## SAFE SPACES

### HNES 2000

**1** credit

Instructor:

Grading: Letter

Thursday, June 22, 2017 - Friday, June 23, 2017

Meet Thursday & Friday {8:30 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.} with course completion June 30, 2017

Location: Juniper Workantile, Bismarck, ND

Academic Level: K-12 Professional Development

NDSU Credit Fee: \$125

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#### COURSE DESCRIPTION:

The purpose of this workshop is to provide training to adults who work with youth. The attendees will learn how to promote healthy sexuality and relationships among the youth they serve. This workshop will focus on positive youth development, adolescent sexual risk behaviors, and the importance of communication between youth and trusted adults. This workshop will highlight the importance of creating a supportive environment in an educational setting to approach topics of teenage pregnancy, bullying, and inclusivity. Specifically, we will cover topics such as consent, healthy relationships, sexual orientation & gender identity, the effects of social media on adolescents, body image and violence. Attendees will also have a chance to practice answering questions that youth might have about sexuality. Upon completion of this program, teachers will have tools to create a supportive environment for students to encourage school attendance and participation.

#### OBJECTIVES:

Upon completion of this class, participants will be able to:

1. Describe current trends in teen pregnancy and dating;
2. Explain key components to reducing risks of unplanned pregnancy and STIs among teens;
3. Identify various aspects of holistic sexuality and how they impact sexual decision-making;
4. Explore their own values related to sexuality and determine how to communicate to students about sexual health free from personal bias and judgment with respect for diversity;
5. Identify warning signs of unhealthy relationships in teen dating and support to youth in unhealthy relationships;
6. Be able to provide links and access to specialized school and community resources for youth when necessary;
7. Utilize motivational interviewing techniques in discussions with adolescents regarding decision making;
8. Work collaboratively and creatively with other professionals to foster students' self-esteem, motivation, and healthy sexual and relationship

choices;

9. Understand healthy youth development and how to answer questions from youth.

10.

### **January - February 2021**

In January, a member of the Teacher Advisory Committee at DLHS directed an email to faculty members requesting input for upcoming professional development at the request of the new superintendent. In number 5 below, this faculty member suggested the possibility of LGBTQ ... training to other staff members. Faculty recommendations for professional development training were to be directed to the superintendent, administration, or committee members. Since the former DLHS college student's efforts, nothing significant regarding staff at the high school changed regarding wanting the training, nor had parents or the community asked for it. In response, in February, I wrote an extensive memo with background to the new superintendent regarding what had transpired since 2013 regarding proposed LGBTQ... training and the former superintendents and school board's rejection. No further LGBTQ... training was suggested the remainder of the 2020-2021 school year and throughout the 2021-2022 school year to staff.

#### **Professional Development:**

Mr. Bakke would like some feedback on what we teachers would like to see for professional development, both at the beginning of the year and for some of the early outs.

Some items are a must and can't be skipped (CPR/First Aid and Suicide Training, for example), but he would like teacher input on what we feel we need and what we want. Here are some basic things to think about:

1. How much time in our classrooms do we need?
2. How much departmental time/7-12 department time would we like?
3. Do we want more sessions offered at the beginning of the year like we had this year? (We have experts on staff, so why pay to bring in someone when we can learn from each other?)
4. How much outside PD (speakers from outside the area) do we want?
5. What topics would we like?

So far a refresher on Ruby Payne was mentioned as was something beyond Ruby Payne that deals with more than poverty such as sensitivity, LGBTQ, empathy, etc.

### **August 2021**

At the start of the school year, staff at DLHS received a list serve email from a district educational support specialist regarding Trevor Project Information with an accompanying pdf link:

[Guide-to-Being-an-Ally-to-Transgender-and-Nonbinary-Youth.pdf](#)  
882 KB

The official Trevor Project website in part states the organization has "increased our efforts in education. Through innovative online training workshops and strategic partnerships across the United States, we have been able to reach more people than ever before. ... 20,000+ Educators trained to create safe



spaces in schools.”

Below was my DLHS email list serve response to the staff list serve email from the district educational support specialist:

DLHS Staff:

The link below displays the “Gender Confusion and Transgender Identity” web page from the American College of Pediatricians website.

<https://acpeds.org/topics/sexuality-issues-of-youth/gender-confusion-and-transgender-identity>

This organization is one of numerous groups across the United States supporting parents’ rights to remain the first and primary teacher of their children’s identity and personhood. Outside interests, such as those behind “The Trevor Project”, seek to co-opt teachers and schools into replacing parents to indoctrinate children in gender ideology. The American College of Pediatricians website powerfully refutes assertions made by The Trevor Project.

For example, as evidence against claims related to teenage suicide, find important data and commentary by scrolling below and tabbing on “The Myth About Suicide and Gender Dysphoric Children,” shown here below.

<https://acpeds.org/assets/for-GID-page-1-The-Myth-About-Suicide-and-Gender-Dysphoric-Children-handout.pdf>

Dan Wakefield

*Public education broadly represents all Americans often holding diverse values. In North Dakota, large numbers of residents do not agree with The Trevor Project’s positions on gender and sexuality. North Dakota public schools officially creating safe spaces and training faculty allies for individuals who support LGBTQ... is in opposition to parents and other local community stakeholders who disagree with The Trevor Project’s positions on gender and sexuality. On principle, establishing The Trevor Project program in public schools is not egalitarian or even-handed because it uses the state to privilege the goals of one group over those of many other groups in the school setting. Fundamentally, establishing The Trevor Project in North Dakota schools would effectively replace parents in their role as the primary and most important teacher of their children’s personhood and identity.*

In 2014, The DLPS superintendent of schools recognized the need for public schools to serve the best interests of all its students and community members on an even-handed basis when LGBTQ... advocates pushed for gender and sex ed training for staff followed by the establishment of faculty allies in classrooms. In an official policy statement, he wrote that “schools are about “tolerance” not “advocacy.” Tolerance for all students is the goal of the Devils Lake Public Schools. We want to provide a safe environment for all students without any specific identification. We start this process with respect assemblies in the elementary schools, Character Counts is implemented at Central Middle School, and we continue to have our district-wide Respect for All Program.”

“The topic of LGBTQ is a very sensitive topic both politically and religiously – two arenas that public schools are much better off not being involved. Public schools, educating K-12 students, are a much different setting than a college or university.”

## November 2021

High School administration advised social studies department faculty that the ND legislature in its special session had passed legislation “prohibiting the teaching of critical race theory in public schools.” The law defined critical race theory as follows: “For purposes of this section, “critical race theory” means the theory that racism is not merely the product of learned individual bias or prejudice, but that racism is systemically embedded in American society and the American legal system to facilitate racial inequality.”

A department member’s response to administration and the rest of the department included this statement: “This is stupid. Any social studies teacher worth their weight as a historian and educator is and has been teaching aspects of CRT.”

*I disagree. My objective would not be focused on CRT as a lens to teach history. It is a distraction. Teaching aspects of CRT does not place the racism that has occurred in the history of the United States in context, nor can it begin to realize in the education of students a meaningful understanding of US History. Slavery, Black Codes, inequality, discrimination, the ongoing Civil Rights movement, etc., are just a few of numerous important themes that together comprise a mosaic of the history of the United States. As examples, today, those themes are explicit, detailed, and comprehensively treated in standard US History texts and need to be taught with depth and purpose, but they only remain important parts of US History.*

*Nikole Hannah-Jones wrote, “Our founding ideals of liberty and equality were false when they were written,” in the opening page from her essay in The 1619 Project. Today, is racism systematically embedded in American society and the American legal system to facilitate racial inequality? Are institutional racial oppressors and oppressed the basis for the founding of the United States and ever present today? Teach on that basis and gaping holes in the history of the nation distort understanding. America came to be what it is now through indigenous North American peoples, Jerusalem, Athens, Greece, Rome, England, West Africa, Spain, France, Europe, Asia ... - the story is ongoing and if this progression is not taught or understood by students, they are at least in part historically illiterate.*

*Laws may be passed that focus attention on schools, and though they make a needed statement about 2023 and not 1619, they are not a fix for a comprehensive, more balanced history of the United States. There will always be varied perspectives in a free and democratic country. Teachers will continue to be influenced by a free flow of information that is protected under the First Amendment.*

An example of this free flow of information is unsolicited copies of *Teaching Tolerance* magazine published by the Southern Poverty Law Center. Their magazine is mailed on a routine basis to the school mailboxes of US History teachers across the country. In the Fall 2020 issue, the lead article reads on page 20, “Since both anti-Blackness and white supremacy are baked into our country’s foundation, they often play out in our daily lives. And just as all white people have the ability to weaponize their whiteness, all Black people can be harmed by it. Black students aren’t exempt. Weaponizing whiteness happens in schools every day.” Another example comes from Corwin, a large corporate multi-media professional development book publisher, educational consultant, and service provider in an unsolicited school email promoting the 2022 book *Our Problem, Our Path*. The email sales blurb states the book “supports White people to help one another find the trailhead and start moving on the path toward a more just, equitable and loving multiracial society for all.”

## Fall 2021 and January 2022

In late Fall of 2021, and again in January 2022, DLHS received several boxes containing an assortment of paperback books as a result of Federal Striving Readers Grant Money. Small bookcases were filled with the books and placed in all Social Studies classrooms with the goal for students to use spare classroom time in reading to increase literacy. I took a cursory look at the first shipment into my classroom. They were a cross-section including fantasy, science-fiction, sports, history, and books about teenage relationships. Despite making students aware of the books and their availability only one student checked out a book in my 6 classes. When the second set of books came in January, some appeared suspect and possibly inappropriate for public high school students based on their blurbs and book covers. I decided to put them in a large, locked cabinet. In early June, the box of books came to my attention again as I was completing checking out of school, so I spent time reviewing them. As a whole, many of the books were endorsed by prominent organizations, and a few had been nominated for or won literary awards. But in my judgement, these were not books that could make into a Great Books academic program. The ones dealing with relationships were generally devoid of purpose, not inspiring or uplifting, for example, high school social scenes and parties, parents generally with problems, teenage angst and self-absorbed image problems, victimization, stereotypical bad treatment from privileged or popular kids. Though I did not take time to review all the books that dealt with relationships, a few seemed to clearly have no uplifting redeeming social or literary value except in the minds of a few critics hundreds of miles away. Some examples:

A Very Large Expanse of Sea by Mafi – sporadic language that didn't seem to do anything for the story – Fuck – Asshole – Shit

I Hope You Get This Message by Farah Naz Rishi – begins with homosexual encounter in the first chapter

White Fragility: Why It's So Hard For White People To Talk About Racism by Robin Diangelo – prominent Critical Race Theory book - no other book in the collection providing a counter view

Unpregnant by Hendricks and Caplan – boy gets girlfriend intentionally pregnant – girl goes on 900 mile road trip with friends for abortion

The Music of What's Happening – teen boys working together becomes gay sexual relationship

We Are Totally Normal by Kanakia – protagonist has gay and straight sex experiences against a backdrop of high school socializing and partying

Odd One Out by Stone – graphic raw sex – a three way

During checkout, I advised administration that the books that had come into the high school from grant money needed to be reviewed for appropriateness of content before they were put into circulation for the coming school year. I was thanked for the heads up. I also informed a colleague who was still spending time in the building about the books, the response was, well that's not so bad it would be different if staff was assigning or teaching from those questionable books. When I shared that response with a leading North Dakota early childhood educator, her response was – what? That would be like knowing drugs are in the school, but staff is not pushing them so it's not a problem and we don't need to do anything about it.

*This was an eye-opener. If this is the norm now for books for high schools, my reaction as a parent and teacher is public schools have become complicit in sexualizing students. There is a need here for legislation, which charges public schools with notifying and making available for the public to review books schools are using, the process directed by local school boards, before those books are used in a school setting. Many traditional school libraries are on the way out, so provision would need to be made for reviewing E books read on tablets.*

## **August 2022**

Long-time colleagues informed me of policy changes at DLHS directed by administration to staff during Fall orientation before the start of classes. The bullet points listed here were stressed by the principal to staff from slides under "What I Told Kids / Parents" Below the bullet points from the principal are my initial reactions.

*Depending on the intent or expectations of these statements by administration, some of these directives appear that they could be coercive and cross 1<sup>st</sup> Amendment boundary rights of staff members.*

*\*If you don't know what LGBTQIA+ stands for/means – you better learn.*

*LGBTQIA+ are letters – conventions of speech with controversial meaning and implying in some ways radically revolutionary anthropology that has entered into public discourse in maybe what – at most the last 1/10 of a second of human history? The terms need to be discussed to arrive at shared meaning and possible agreement as to their validity. What in depth does the administrator think those terms mean? The staff? The community? Is there shared agreement on meanings and the implications of those meanings for educating students in the school setting?*

*\*Your moral compass cannot get in the way of embracing and educating our children.*

*What? Teachers are not to rely on their moral compass in their interactions with students, staff, and their fellow human beings? So, there is no objective moral truth? The morality of every action is relative? Then who decides the limits of when staff can be compelled to violate their conscience? Whose moral compass should guide staff when teaching students? The administrator?*

*\*Your religious beliefs are your beliefs. You can hold these near and dear, but they cannot get in the way of your willingness to embrace and educate our children.*

*Religious beliefs don't count? The first amendment to the US Constitution doesn't count? Under what circumstances? Someone obviously needs an explanation of what the Constitution means and what system of government we live under.*

*So, teachers cannot rely on moral truth or recognized natural law, the basis of religious teaching, in guiding their actions? Define embracing and educating. Embracing how? Educating what? There are problems with understanding this platitude if that is what it is and what these statements are meant to convey. Some forms of embracing are damaging. Some educational ideas may be hurtful. Who decides? The administrator?*

*\*We need to move past tolerance! Tolerate is a negative word. We cannot be people who tolerate the beliefs of others or the behaviors of others.*

*Why is tolerance a negative word? It indicates a willingness to allow others to, for example, express an opinion or conduct an action, but not agree with that opinion or action. It is a norm in a free complex society and as the Founders stress in the Federalist Papers our system of government is composed of opposing factions and doesn't function without conflict and disagreement. Democracy is often messy. To insist on acceptance, or agreement, or affirmation from others for your own or others actions or beliefs is a form of coercion. Compelled speech or compelled thought is not free speech or freedom of thought. Totalitarian societies and governments in our time and throughout history insist and function on conformity of thoughts and actions – group think.*

What does administration mean by “our children” in these bullet points? This is a serious question. Because in staff meetings, on more than one occasion, the principal has informed staff that churches have declined, and families have declined, so now the school needs to do more to compensate. Staff has objected openly to the practical implications of that statement. Parents on staff do not want the school to assume more responsibility for their families. Were parents in the community asked if they wanted the school to assume more responsibility for raising their children? Have citizens been asked if they want the school to replace the religious values of their families with secular values?

These principal's bullet points at last Fall's staff orientation before school began were stressed to staff from slides under “Inclusive Environment.” Below those bullet points are my reactions to the principal's bullet points.

\*Gender Identity, name, state ID (name), testing, etc. ...

\*Powerschool will be updated with preferred name/gender. Use those.

*In teaching I very occasionally had students asked to be called by another name. I accommodated those students who I thought were sincere. But this can also become a game. Today students sometimes have unusual and unique names that are not based on phonetics. Occasionally, names are forgotten or unintentionally mis-pronounced and most students understand that. Practically speaking, how is gender used in Powerschool and why does that matter?*

\*Pronouns

\*Some students may request they/them specifically while other want he/his, she/her, etc. ... honor what they ask for.

*Where is this social engineering coming from? In over a quarter century of teaching, I never experienced any student ask to be addressed by a specific pronoun. Why is this needed? When have any staff become aware of students banging down office doors demanding to be addressed by pronouns? This directive is almost entirely irrelevant and non-sensical. People speak using conventional address in high schools. In school, pronouns are rarely used by teachers addressing a student. Students are addressed by their given name or occasionally by a nickname. To use a recent figure of speech questioning the inanity of this directive: “What is Woman?” In this Brave New World that is being created at DLHS and in some schools across North Dakota, what happens if someone is known to be male or female and cross-dresses and is then not called by the name they want by staff or students? Will not remembering to use one of the over 50 pronouns now being tried out be considered a serious infraction of policy? Will confusing that pronoun with a new one that is manufactured next week and picked up by a student on*

*social media for use – will that be considered a serious infraction of policy? Will non-participation in gender fluidity preferences, contrary to known biological reality, be consider cause for dismissal or some form of demotion or punishment for staff or students?*

Compelled speech (that serves no practical purpose) is not free speech and is in apparent conflict with the 1<sup>st</sup> Amendment to the US Constitution.

On my exit form last May terminating employment, I was asked to list challenges facing Devils Lake Public School for use by the superintendent and the school board. The number one problem I listed getting in the way of students getting an education was the ever-growing culture of distraction created by ever-growing, unnecessary time-wasting policies and activities in our schools.

Here are the words of staff at DLHS after experiencing Fall orientation before the start of classes: “I don't understand why we are doing this. I am just here to teach. I don't care what your sexual orientation is, your religious background, other personal beliefs, or what you want to be called, etc. I just want to teach.”

### **Request of the Legislature of the State of North Dakota**

Given the now apparent threat to citizens' rights under the 1<sup>st</sup> amendment to the US Constitution that are now being instituted in our schools through policies by a small group of unrepresentative activists, a law recognizing freedom of speech, conscience, and religion for staff and students in North Dakota schools should be enacted with accompanying penalties for intentional infractions.

Footnote: A 2020 graduate of DLHS entering the engineering program at NDSU, during online orientation led by gender studies majors, with about 50 other Freshmen, was provided and strongly encouraged to pick from a wide range of pronouns for use on campus. He told me none of them were having it. (sorry, I think I just used a banned word)

Dan Wakefield

Devils Lake, North Dakota

