

A is for
activist

WHOSE VALUES?

Educational excellence threatened **by** ideology
in Edina schools.



By
**Katherine
Kersten**

Ten years ago the Edina Public Schools (EPS) were an academic showplace—a crown jewel among Minnesota school districts. Parents who moved to

Edina were happy to pay a premium for a house, knowing it bought their kids access to the district's renowned schools. Students from other districts might roll their eyes at the Edina "Hornets" affluence—branding them "cake-eaters"—but they had to acknowledge their academic success.

Today, the Edina district's test scores are dropping. In 2014, 86 percent of Edina High School (EHS) students met state reading standards; today it's 79 percent. In 2014, 79 percent of high school students were doing grade-level work in math; today it's only 66 percent. In other words, one in five Edina High School students now can't read at grade level, and one-third can't do grade-level math.

These test results dropped EHS's ranking among Minnesota high schools from fifth to 29th in reading proficiency and from 10th to 40th in math proficiency, according to Minnesota Department of Education data. This reveals a more substantial decline than the high school rankings U.S. News & World Report publishes annually, which show EHS dropping from first place in 2014 to fourth place today.

In the district as a whole, about 30 percent of kids are not "on track for success" in reading, and the same goes for math.

Many parents are frustrated, and there are reports of families leaving the district. Some teachers say an increasing number of their colleagues are grimly trying to

stick it out until they can afford to retire.

Meanwhile, high school students in a number of other districts are performing significantly better. At Wayzata High School, for example, reading and math proficiency are 85 percent and 77 per-



The Edina district's unrelenting focus on skin color is the leading edge of a larger ideological campaign to shape students' attitudes and beliefs on a range of controversial issues—most importantly, the familiar litany of "race, class, gender." Meanwhile, ordinary students are too often falling through the cracks and gifted education is languishing.

cent, respectively. At Orono High School, the figures are 85 percent and 73 percent.

Most impressive may be Eastview Senior High School in Rosemount-Apple Valley-Eagan. At Eastview, 82 percent of students are reading at grade level and 83



***Katherine Kersten**, a writer and attorney, is a Senior Policy Fellow at Center of the American Experiment. She served as a Metro columnist for the Star Tribune from 2005 to 2008, and as an opinion columnist for the paper for 15 years between 1996 and 2013. She was a founding director of the Center, and served as its chair from 1996 to 1998.*

percent are doing grade-level math. Significantly, Eastview has a much larger percentage of minority and low-income students than Edina: 32 percent minority and 17 percent low-income, compared to Edina's 24 percent minority and 9 percent low-income.

What's happened to the Edina schools? A variety of factors may be at work, but one thing is clear: There's been a sea change in educational philosophy, and it comes from the top.

Instead of giving Edina students the intellectual tools necessary to thrive in the 21st century, Edina public school leaders are increasingly using limited school time to indoctrinate students in left-wing political orthodoxies.

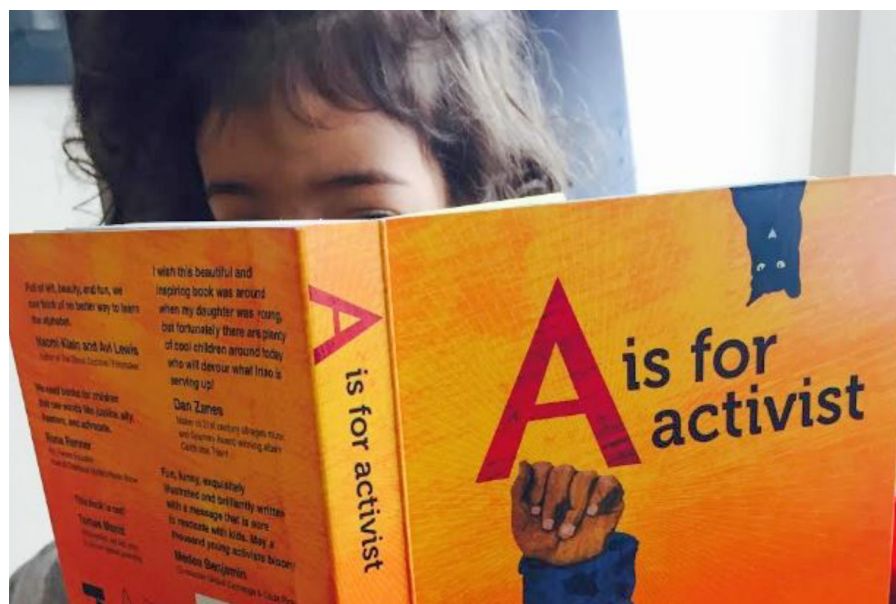
Today, for example, K-2 students at Edina Highlands Elementary School are learning—through the “Melanin Project”—to focus on skin color and to think of white skin as cause for guilt. “Equity” is listed as a primary criterion on the district's evaluation for K-5 math curricula. At Edina High School, teachers are haranguing students on “White Privilege,” and drilling into them that white males oppress and endanger women. In a U.S. Literature and Composition class, 11th-graders are being taught to “apply marxist [sic], feminist” and “post-colonial” “lenses to literature.”

In short, in Edina, reading, writing, math and critical thinking skills are taking a backseat to an ideological crusade.

A veteran teacher sums it up this way: In the last few years, the EPS administration has “shifted from a focus on *excellence for all students* to a focus on ‘equity’”—“racial equity,” that is.

In education-ese, “equity” doesn't have its common-sense meaning of equal treatment for all. On the contrary, it signals an obsession with “white privilege,” and an effort to blame any academic challenge that minority students may have on institutional racial bias. Equity, understood as equal treatment, is a standard with universal support. But as a mask for racial identity politics, it can undermine a school district's fundamental educational mission.

The Edina district's unrelenting focus



[Principal Katie] Mahoney uses Highlands' social media—including her “equity corner” on the school's Wonder blog—to promote a range of left-wing ideological propaganda. One such resource, typical of the rest, is an A-B-C book for kids entitled *A is for Activist*. Its pages feature texts like the following: “A is for Activist... Are you An Activist?” “C is for... Creative Counter to Corporate vultures.” “F is for Feminist.” “T is for Trans.” “X is for Malcolm As in Malcolm X.”

on skin color is the leading edge of a larger ideological campaign to shape students' attitudes and beliefs on a range of controversial issues—most importantly, the familiar litany of “race, class, gender.” Meanwhile, ordinary students are too often falling through the cracks and gifted education is languishing.

Edina district leaders, however, show little concern about falling scores or the increasing role of indoctrination in the classroom. In fact, the Edina School Board voted unanimously on August 14, 2017, to authorize an election on November 7 to seek a hefty increase in Edina's school levy. Residents can expect those funds to be used to double down on the status quo.

The district's new superintendent, John Schultz, appears oblivious to the real state of affairs. “I have always known Edina to be a high-quality, destination school district,” he told the Edina Sun Current in August. “This has become even more clear to me since taking over leadership in July [2017].”

Though a growing number of parents, students and teachers are angry and frustrated about recent developments, they hesitate to protest publicly. Students and parents fear bullying and retaliation in terms of grades and classroom humiliation. Teachers who don't toe the orthodox line fear ostracism and a tainted career. The climate of intimidation is so intense that not one of those

interviewed for this article would speak on the record.

The dramatic shift

The dramatic shift in focus at EPS first came to the attention of Center of the American Experiment when we learned of the partisan circus at Edina High School that followed the November 2016 presidential election. After we exposed this on our web site, numerous Edina parents and students contacted us by email and Facebook and on our web site, eager to relate their own stories of indoctrination and persecution.

We quickly discovered that the crisis at EPS goes much deeper than we had suspected.

The Edina schools have embraced an ideologically-tinged focus on issues of racial identity for some time. However, in 2012, that emphasis ramped up big-time, when the district launched a Strategic Planning and Revision process to address the racial achievement gap. (In Edina, a large gap exists between white students' academic performance and that of black and Hispanic students, on average, while Asian students, on average, do better than white students in both reading and math.) The result was an initiative called the "All for All" plan, adopted in 2013.

The All for All plan's fundamental premise is that white racism—not socio-economic factors like family breakdown—is the primary cause of the achievement gap. If minority students' academic performance is to improve, "systems that perpetuate inequities" must be "interrupt[ed]" and "barriers rooted in racial constructs and cultural misunderstandings" must be "eliminate[d]," according to the district's position statement on "Racial Equity and Cultural Competence in Edina Public Schools."

In other words, EPS has committed itself to move beyond teaching reading,

math and science to transforming society.

To achieve this ambitious goal, the All for All plan mandated "a shift in how all district employees approach their work." Going forward, the Edina Public Schools must view "all teaching and learning experiences" through a "lens of racial equity," according to the district's position statement on equity.

In line with this new mission, the district has adopted the following policies, among others:

- A commitment to "recruit, hire and retain high-quality, *racially conscious* teachers and administrators" (emphasis added);
- A policy of ensuring that students "acquire an awareness of their own cultural identity and value racial, cultural and ethnic

diversities." (Translation: Schools must teach students that their personal "identity" is irrevocably linked to the color of their skin. What would Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., say?);

- A "comprehensive program" of "co- and extracurricular activities" to promote district leaders' race-based vision; and
- A concerted "outreach to parents and families with a focus on race, lower socio-economic status and cultural diversity."

In sum, the All for All plan seeks to groom students, parents and teachers to be agents of social change.

Four years later, the results are in.

Cornelia Elementary School

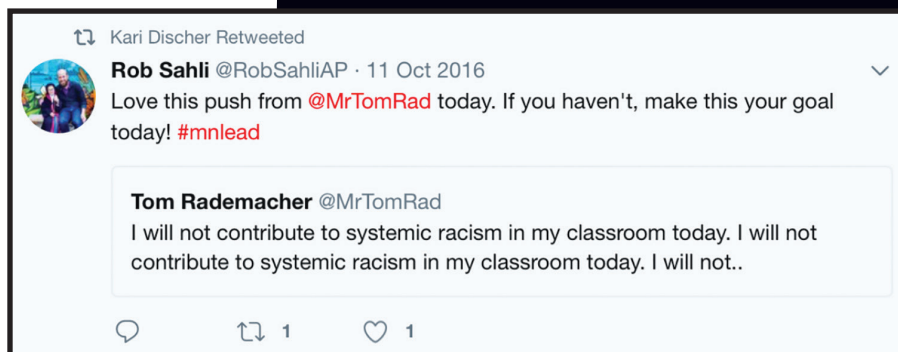
Cornelia Elementary School, K-5, has one of the district's largest populations of elementary-aged minority and low-income students. Its student body is 53 percent white, 24 percent Asian, 9 percent Hispanic, 9 percent black, 20 percent low-income and 18 percent English Language Learner (ELL). If a race-based approach to education benefits minority students—as its advocates maintain—

Cornelia should be among the schools seeing the greatest gains. Unfortunately, the opposite is true.

Cornelia's principal, Lisa Masica, was named principal in 2014, as part of the district's strategy of hiring "race-conscious" administrators. She began her tenure by obtaining a curriculum called "Perspectives for a Diverse America," part of the "Teaching Tolerance Anti-Bias Framework" of the far-left Southern Poverty Law Center. The activist-oriented curriculum focuses on four "social justice



Last year, Highlands students in grades K-2 participated in the "Melanin Project," learning to view themselves and their classmates in terms of skin color. Educators have no business prompting immature and impressionable children to think in terms of skin color at all.



Tom Rademacher, Minnesota's 2014 Teacher of the Year, is a frequently quoted liberal activist in the schools.

standards”—“Unpacking Identity,” “Unpacking Diversity,” “Understanding Justice” and “Unpacking Action.”

In August 2015, Masica wrote in Cornelia's “Week at a Glance”—a weekly agenda for teachers—that she would be “sharing something equity related” with them on a regular basis, “ideally every week.” At staff meetings, “equity was the only thing we talked about, not the nuts and bolts of teaching reading and math,” according to one teacher.

Generally, the resources Masica circulated had a political, not an academic slant. In one video, for example, black

The All for All plan's fundamental premise is that white racism—not socio-economic factors like family breakdown—is the primary cause of the achievement gap.

“slam poet” Clint Smith praises Black Lives Matter and denounces what he calls police racism and brutality. In another, “tri-tongued” poet Jamila Lyiscott delivers an impassioned presentation that Masica characterized as “micro-aggression, cultural adaptation, and equity all rolled into one four-minute spoken word!”

Yet another resource was an essay from “Raising Race Conscious Children,” an internet site whose goal is “to dismantle the color-blind framework and prepare young people to work toward racial justice.” The essay was entitled “Are You a Boy or a Girl? Helping Young Children Think Through Gender,” by Katie Schaffer. Schaffer describes herself as “a white cis queer woman dedicated to collectively envisioning and implementing liberatory educational practices.”

Masica bombarded teachers with equity-related resources like those just described all year, Cornelia teachers say.

In 2016, Masica changed the way reading and math instruction is delivered at Cornelia, according to educators and parents familiar with the situation. Apparently, the goal was to make instruction more racially equitable. The All for All plan states that “equity” will be achieved when academic performance is no longer “predictable” by race and income. Unfortunately, as yet, this state of affairs has been achieved at few, if any, schools in the nation. This means that at Cornelia—as elsewhere—students who need special help tend to be disproportionately black and Hispanic.

Masica instituted instructional changes that made it harder for struggling students to get the intensive, focused help they needed to improve their skills in reading and/or math, Cornelia teachers and parents say. Previously, the school had used a district-endorsed process of grouping students together (on a flexible

basis) during one period of the day, according to their current abilities. This allowed teachers to target instruction to a narrower range of students, so they could build on their strengths and work to correct their weaknesses.

Masica eliminated the practice of “flex groups,” according to those familiar with the situation. Instead, during flex time, each classroom was required to include students of a broad range of abilities—from those above the norm to those several grade levels below. A classroom like this might “look” more equitable, since skin colors were more evenly dis-

At staff meetings, “equity was the only thing we talked about, not the nuts and bolts of teaching reading and math,” according to one teacher.

tributed. But it impeded teachers' ability to give struggling kids the targeted help they needed, according to teachers and parents.

The change, though well-intentioned, seems to have backfired. Cornelia's scores on Minnesota's MCA-III tests from 2015 to 2017 appear to tell the tale. Rather than hoped-for improvement, there was a decline in reading proficiency—the key to success in all other disciplines.

From 2015 to 2017, reading proficiency for Cornelia students, all grades, fell from 78 percent to 70 percent. But minority students' (including black, Hispanic, Asian and two or more races) ability to read at grade level dropped from 70 percent to 58 percent. The reading proficiency rate of black, Hispanic, and students of two or more races dropped from 58 percent to 34 percent. For low-income students, the percentage reading

at grade level fell from 50 to 40 percent. The number of Hispanic students, all grades, who did not meet the reading standards at all (versus partially meeting them) increased from four to 14 between 2015 and 2017.

A similar pattern, though not as dramatic, also occurred in math performance. The ability of minority students, as a group, to do math at grade level declined from 71 percent in 2015 to 64 percent in 2017. The proficiency rate of black, Hispanic and students of two or more races dropped from 51.5 percent to 38 percent. Low-income students fell from 51 percent to 41 percent.

When questioned, the Edina School District's director of communications, Susan Brott, did not respond directly to a query about how reading and math instruction changed at Cornelia under Masica. She merely stated that "All elementary schools in Edina made some changes last year in how reading and math learning groups were identified."

The students at Cornelia will soon be high school students. Unless things change quickly, the trend underway there will soon be dragging down academic performance at Edina High School, and—far more importantly—blighting the lives of the students who don't appear to be getting the help they need.

Highlands Elementary School

Highlands Elementary School is another institution that exemplifies the direction the All for All plan is taking the Edina school district. Highlands' student body is 73 percent white, 4 percent Hispanic, 6 percent black, 11 percent Asian, 6 percent low-income and 5 percent ELL.

Katie Mahoney, a former Highlands teacher, was named the school's principal in 2016, apparently because of her

credentials as a race-conscious "social justice warrior." In her first year on the job, Mahoney moved to implement the All for All strategy in a variety of respects, including teaching youngsters to define themselves by race and initiating race-based outreach to parents.

For example, last year, children in grades K-2 participated in the "Melanin Project," learning to view themselves and their classmates in terms of skin color. Among other things, they traced their

class time focusing on race. Many students were lectured on the topic and carried out a biographical research project in which they were encouraged to write about a black historical or contemporary figure.

Mahoney uses Highlands' social media—including her "equity corner" on the school's Wonder blog—to promote a broad range of left-wing ideological propaganda. One such resource, typical of the rest, is an A-B-C book for kids entitled

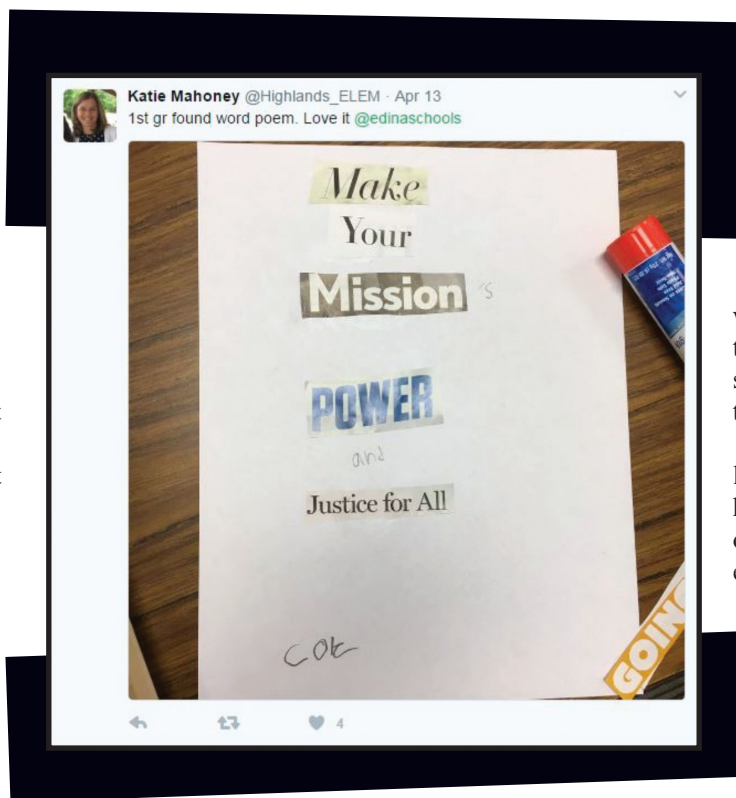
A is for Activist. Its pages feature texts like the following: "A is for Activist.. Are you An Activist?" "C is for... Creative Counter to Corporate vultures." "F is for Feminist." "T is for Trans." "X is for Malcolm As in Malcolm X."

What do Edina parents who work in business—and taxpayers who finance the school—think about being tarred as "corporate vultures?"

Mahoney also uses Highlands' "parent nights" as a vehicle for proselytizing families on racial identity ideology. For example, the 2016-17 school year opened in October with a dinner and discussion entitled "SPEAK UP AGAINST BIAS: Microaggressions and how to talk about difficult racial issues and current

events with kids." It closed in April, with another parent dinner and discussion focused on "talking to our kids about race."

Mahoney has held up the Berkeley School in Berkeley, California, to Highlands parents and students as a model of social activism going forward. She attended the Changemaker School Summit in New Mexico in February 2017, and posted photos on the Wonder blog of "research students did on activist groups." One featured project praised Black Lives Matter and denounced "police brutality." Another read, "Black Lives Matter is an amazing organization that is helping



Highlands' principal Katie Mahoney congratulates a first grader for creating a political poem.

hands and colored them to reflect their skin tone for a classroom poster. The poster reads, "Stop thinking your skin color is better than anyone else's [sic]! Everyone is Special!"

The poster's message is that five-to-seven-year olds naturally think of themselves and others in terms of skin color, and must be reprimanded for doing so. Ironically, the project conditions young children to do the very thing it condemns.

Older Highlands students also spent

people realize that black lives matter and our lives are all equal.... We hope you learn to love it just as much as we do after taking a look at our project!”

“I am excited to think with staff, students and families of how to continue this work at HL [Highlands],” Mahoney wrote.

Edina High School

The ideological tidal wave that has hit the Edina schools reaches its crescendo at the high school.

Edina High School is consumed by a hyper-focus on left-wing identity politics. The epicenter may be the school’s English/Language Arts department. The focus there goes beyond racial issues to an angry, male-bashing feminism and a smorgasbord of left-wing ideological hobby horses. Students hear repeated calls for social justice, activism and resistance from many of their English teachers.

In the high school’s required 10th-grade English course, called Pre-Advanced Placement English, for example, students read works that “reflect diversity in race, gender, age, economics, and geography.” The themes of the course are “Colonization,” “Immigration,” “Social Constructions of Race, Class and Gender,” and “Humanity in the Face of Destruction.” The course description for Mrs. Joelle Reiling’s 11th-grade U.S. Literature and Composition class states a similar goal: “By the end of the year, you will have...learned how to apply marxist [sic], feminist, post-colonial [and] psychoanalytic...lenses to literature.”

One disgusted student offered his own perspective on Pre-AP English on the “Rate My Professor” web site: “[This] class should be renamed...with course description as ‘Why white males are bad, and how oppressive they are.’”

Many of the Edina students and parents who made comments to Center of the American Experiment complained of the climate of fear and intimidation at Edina High. One parent said this:

We’re tired of them trying to indoctrinate our children to believe what they

believe rather than teaching critical thinking and actual course work. We’re tired of our kids coming home feeling defeated because their beliefs are forbidden at school and they will be ostracized if they speak out. We’re tired of our kids telling us that all they hear in [Language Arts] and other classes is that white people, especially white



“[T]he teacher, while reading a poem aloud, came to a word, stopped, and said that the word she was about to say next made her feel physically ill—just by saying it. The word was Police.”

—An Edina parent

men, are bad, over and over. We’re absolutely sickened when our son tells us that he is labeled a racist, sexist and rapist — yes, a RAPIST — because he is a white male. (This was all in a Venn diagram on the white board. We have a photo.)

Another parent echoed these concerns:

During Edina’s ‘May Term,’ our child had no choice but to take a class called ‘Race, Racism and Whiteness’ as all other classes were full. The name alone says it all. It was in this class that the teacher, while reading a poem aloud, came to a word, stopped, and said that the word she was about to say next made her feel physically ill — just by saying it. The word was Police.

Having family members who have served in public safety, one of whom was killed in the line of duty, we immediately went to the administration and told them we were pulling our child out of that class, our child would not return and our child would receive full credit. We do give credit to the administrative staff we worked with, who was very responsive and agreed to our terms without question.

In a number of classrooms, students who dare to offer a dissenting perspective can expect to be bullied and humiliated. Many fear retaliation—in terms of grades or humiliation before peers—if they voice a contrary opinion.

Both students and parents describe the politicized expectations in class discussions and writing assignments. According to one mother,

My kids have written things they don’t believe just to survive. They know exactly what the teacher wants. They almost don’t see anything incorrect in doing that anymore, because it’s so engrained. They have endured enough public shaming to say they will not put themselves in that position again.

Teachers’ Twitter feeds have become a powerful platform for political indoctrination. For example, EHS English teacher Jackie Roehl, 2012 Minnesota Teacher of the Year, invites students to “follow me on Twitter or send a Face-

book friend request to Jac Roehl to keep up with the latest class news.” Her Twitter account is replete with political sentiments like the following:

**Great cover on the latest
@NewYorker #WomensMarch
#resist**

**Happy to cast votes today for
@keithellison and Justice Natalie
Hudson #vote #MNPrimary**

**@FossilFreeYale Love the sign
‘Yale Football Divest’ on @espn
@Yale #TheGame**

Roehl’s retweets for young people’s consumption lead students to Twitter feeds like #NoMoreWhiteLies, where they can find tweets like:

**CRAKKA JESUS GOTTA GO!
MARY AZZ TOO!...
#JESUSISTHE MASCOTFOR
WHITESUPREMACY**

Other English teachers also use their Twitter accounts to broadcast their politics, most likely reflecting what kids hear in their classrooms. Here’s teacher Kristin Benson, for example:

**Sophs, good discussion today about
The Color Purple and individual v
systemic forms of power. Remember
prejudice + power = oppression.**

Or

**It’s banned book week. Read some-
thing that speaks truth to power.**

From teacher Kari Discher (retweet):

**Rob Sahli @RobSahliAP: Love this
push from @MrTomRad today. If
you haven’t, make this your goal
today! #mnlead**

**Tom Rademacher @MrTomRad:
I will not contribute to systemic
racism in my classroom today.
I will not contribute to systemic
racism in my classroom today. I
will not...**

From teacher Rachel Hatten (who is teaching elsewhere as of Fall 2017):

**Black girls and women in our
society are always ‘ready’ for
whatever abuse is visited upon
them. (nytimes.com)**

**Dismantling Obamacare & slash-
ing Medicaid would be a blow
against signature victories for
racial equality in US. (retweet)**

The multicultural show

Edina High leaders’ willingness to use their power to indoctrinate a captive student body was on display at the school’s “Multicultural Show” in April 2017. Student performers used the show to call “students, faculty, staff and administrators to act en masse to address racial injustice,” according to Zephyrus, the high school’s student newspaper and official news site.

The show’s organizers sought to “ignite a conversation pertaining to white privilege and the Black Lives Matter movement,” the paper reports. For example, juniors Guled Said and Suleqa Wasyo read a poem titled “White Privilege,” which “reflected the complexities of the Black Lives Matter movement,” according to Zephyrus. An adapted poem called “To be Black, a Woman and Alive,” “emphasized the hypocrisy of gender and racial standards.”

In another performance, a female student delivered an explicit address about her sexual fantasies regarding a classmate. (A sample: “I spent seventh-grade music classes imagining her legs intertwining with mine, her body constantly reminding me of a violin, and I was begging to be allowed to pluck one string.”) If a male student had spoken words like this in a school assembly, he would probably have been hustled off the stage, accused of sexual harassment.

“The audience appeared restless” during the multicultural show, according to Zephyrus, and no wonder. The event seemed calculated to offend both whites and males.

The show is “an opportunity to give a voice to the minorities in spite of the ma-

jority’s discomfort,” the paper maintained. Nicki Tait, Youth Serving Youth coordinator and Multicultural Show advisor, confirmed that organizers interpreted the discomfort as a sign of success. “We learn our biggest lessons when we shut up and we’re uncomfortable,” she told Zephyrus. Had a performance by white or male students offended Tait, however, one suspects she would have denounced them to school authorities for bigotry and harassment.

Post-election furor

The ideological brew at EHS boiled over on November 9, 2016, the day after the presidential election.

“I felt like the school was descending into mass hysteria,” one student commented to the Center. Trump’s victory, others stated, was portrayed as “the end of the world as we know it.”

Students and parents flooded the Center with stories of post-election partisan bullying. One student wrote:

The day after the election I was texting my mom to pick me up from school and she almost had to!! Every teacher was crying in class, one even told the whole class ‘Trump winning is worse than 9/11 and the Columbine shooting.’ The amount of liberal propaganda that was pushed every single day in class this year was worse than it’s ever been—and you’re bullied by the teachers and every student if you dare speak against it.

Another student confirmed this:

Yeah its horrible, the teachers can absolutely do whatever they want. The administration will do nothing about it!! The day of the election every single student was in the commons chanting ‘F*** TRUMP’ and the teachers never did anything. A LOT of people are starting to complain and my mom has some friends who are leaving the school district.

The next day, the day after Trump won, was even harder. Teachers were crying alongside students in the class-

room. Speeches by teachers included the phrase ‘we will make it through this together.’ One teacher said in front of a class of 100, through tears that ‘the election was rigged.’ Teachers bashed President Trump in front of their students, and people continued to bully me for my views. ...I had to have my mom come pick me up after third hour that day. I couldn’t stand to walk around a school filled with both teachers and students crying and looking to me through their tears with hurtful eyes.

In an email to a school administrator (and then forwarded to the Center), one mother wrote, “In my 10th-grader’s AP World [History] class, [the teacher] called out any Trump supporters and asked them to assure the class that they weren’t racist.”

The hysteria was hardly confined to the high school. A teacher wrote the Center that at one elementary school, a third-grade student wore a Trump t-shirt following the election. This is what followed, the teacher said:

The teacher went into the staff lounge, announcing she was so upset...she asked the student not to wear it into her classroom again, and went on to disparage his family...asking all teachers in the lounge if they knew this family was Republican, and stating that she was so disappointed, etc.

Will that teacher, and all who voiced the shock about this third-grader’s family...treat him and his siblings differently through the years, because of his family’s political point of view?

Partisan editorializing

Edina School District Policies clearly prohibit the lack of balance and ideological strong-arming that appear to be the norm at the high school.

Policy 606, for example, addresses “controversial issues,” among other topics. The policy requires that “all sides of [an] issue be given proper hearing” in the classroom and that students learn about “alternative points of view.” It also pro-

hibits a teacher from using “his/her position to forward his/her own...political...or social bias.” Teachers may express a personal opinion if they identify it as such, but are barred from doing so “for the purpose of persuading students to his/her point of view.”

A striking violation of this policy occurred on November 22, 2016, when Edina High’s student newspaper ran an editorial by English teacher Tim Klobuchar about the presidential election. It was co-signed by 80 teachers.

Klobuchar’s hyper-partisan editorial suggested that America’s President-elect was a racist, and that “some people feel the election result has validated them to unleash their worst impulses.”

“Over the course of the long campaign,” the editorial intoned,

multiple groups of students might have felt targeted in some way: black, Hispanic, Muslim, Jewish, LGBTQ+, and female students—particularly sexual assault survivors—among them.

Right now, many of you in these groups feel more vulnerable than usual because of the racist image spread on social media, as well as the results of the election.

In a display of moral posturing, Klobuchar and his co-signers urged allegedly trembling students to turn to their teachers for protection:

Many of you have made clear through conversations with us that right now, you don’t feel physically safe. This is unacceptable, and we will do everything in our power to fight against forces that could harm you.

For our part, we’ll do everything we can to abide by these words from Tom Rademacher, Minnesota’s 2014 Teacher of the Year, which he wrote two days after the election:

‘We will fail, but will not accept failure. We will teach. We will teach to fix a world we cannot fix. We

will teach rebellion against a broken world. We can do that, starting today.’

Klobuchar is a fervent Democrat, and a relative of Minnesota’s Senator Amy Klobuchar, also a Democrat. He and the teachers who signed this editorial were aligning themselves with Hillary Clinton and the Democratic Party, and proposing that students who disagreed with them were endangering others.

This editorial had no place in a student newspaper. EPS District Policy 512 states that expression in an official school publication is subject to editorial control, and that control should be used to ensure that “the school is not associated with any position other than neutrality on matters of political controversy.” Yet the 80 teachers who signed the editorial apparently paid no penalty. Ironically, teacher Sally Larkins, who is charged with identifying and preventing bias as the paper’s faculty advisor, signed the editorial herself.

After the editorial sparked criticism, Intellectual Takeout—a Minnesota public policy institution—asked Tim Klobuchar for a comment. “I stand behind every word...,” Klobuchar wrote in response. It is not political, he added, “to take a stand in the classroom against racism, sexism, and other statements that are intended to harass, bully or marginalize other students.”

Parents’ and teachers’ reaction

Edina parents are increasingly up in arms about EPS’s heavy-handed indoctrination of students and intolerance of diverse viewpoints. “What we are saying is that the district must follow its own rules,” one father says.

To ease parents’ concerns about the district’s falling test scores, EPS leaders are reportedly suggesting that lower scores are the result of student “opt-outs” from MCA-III tests. In fact, in 2017, only 20 students in an 11th-grade class of 676 were opted out of the math test by their parents, and only seven out of a 10th-grade class of 687 were opted out of the reading test, according to the Minnesota Department of Education.

One veteran teacher laments that, in an academic environment where race and ethnicity get so much attention, many kids are “simply getting lost in the shuffle.” “Gifted parents are screaming,” another teacher reports. The teacher points out that the district’s “Young Scholars” program gives minority students’ preference on gifted services. “Minnetonka is eating us for lunch on gifted education,” she says.

And district administrators? A long-time teacher makes this observation: “They are scared about the declining scores. But they chose to go down this path and now they are stuck with it.”

What’s it like to be an Edina teacher

who refuses to conform to EPS’s rigid ideological orthodoxy? One teacher wrote on the Center’s web site that “one of the reasons I’m leaving the teaching field” is that “I’m tired of being a secret agent libertarian minded teacher.”

Another EPS faculty member responded this way:

Wait. There’s another one out there? Although I’m not a ‘secret’ agent because I’m out with my opinions (not in my classroom) and am very unpopular with our union president. I’ve been told on multiple occasions to quit my job and work at a private school or for the Koch brothers. I had a curriculum trainer ask me this summer why I lived in the Twin Cities rather than in greater MN with more of my kind.

Why this is wrong

The ideological bias that saturates the Edina Public Schools is seriously harming students, parents and the larger Edina community.

The All for All plan’s ostensible goal is to improve minority students’ academic achievement.

Yet overall, scores continue to disappoint. At Cornelia—an elementary school where the foundation for students’ future success or failure is laid—black and Hispanic students’ performance in reading, on average, appears to have declined substantially. There is only so much time in the school day. In Edina, it seems, too much of that time is devoted to racial identity politics rather than instruction.

Edina minority students are being harmed in another way. They are being conditioned at an early age to view themselves reflexively as victims—and to succumb to the temptation, common to all people, to blame others for their problems. Unfortunately, no attitude interferes more with success, happiness, productivity and a sense of control in one’s life. No attitude raises a greater barrier to mature adulthood.

White students are also being harmed. The notion that racial identity is tied to personal identity at the deepest level is

being drilled into them (and their minority classmates) as young as kindergarten. This is a pernicious doctrine, which our nation should have abandoned decades ago.

The Edina schools’ new race-based ideology undermines all students’ ability to think creatively and critically—that is, to think freely. Students are learning to parrot orthodoxy back to teachers, and to look nervously over their shoulders in case the authorities catch them in a forbidden thought or a “micro-aggression.” They are learning that, at school, a top priority must be to please those in power. Disturbingly, some parents say that their children appear increasingly to see nothing out of the ordinary in this.

The Edina School District’s new approach to education is dressed up as concern for “equity.” In fact, it is an oppressive ideology with authoritarian undercurrents that steamrolls students and intimidates parents.

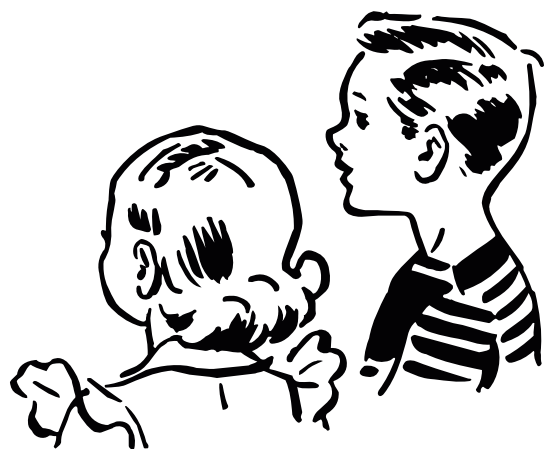
At the heart of the Edina schools’ new ideology is an unspoken assumption that the district’s leadership must confront and reject. It is the premise that underlies the entire All for All project.

This assumption is that people who object to categorizing others in terms of race, or who don’t see white males as oppressors, or who voted for Donald Trump are—by definition—“racists” or “sexists,” benighted and bigoted. Put another way, it is the idea that such people are not just wrong, but evil.

It is the conviction that “well-intentioned” leaders like Edina school policy makers and teachers—simply by virtue of the “enlightened” attitudes they claim to hold—are entitled to dominate discussion, denouncing and silencing others.

Students who absorb this attitude from their teachers will not be able to develop true tolerance or to strive, in good faith, to understand diverse points of view. In the future, if too many citizens adopt such a position, neither civility nor democratic governance will be possible.

If EPS continues to embrace this ideology, the Edina public schools will continue a precipitous downward slide from their former high reputation on Minnesota’s educational stage. ★



“My kids have written things they don’t believe just to survive. They know exactly what the teacher wants. They almost don’t see anything incorrect in doing that anymore, because it’s so engrained. They have endured enough public shaming to say they will not put themselves in that position again.”

—An Edina parent