



Leny Wallen-Friedman  
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August 24, 2017

Dear Chairman Wallen-Friedman:

I write as one member of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, and not on behalf of the Commission as a whole, to address news reports about alleged behavior by teachers and students in Edina High School. Such behavior, if it occurred, would be discriminatory and unprofessional.

On July 7, 2017, the Center of the American Experiment reported that eighty Edina High School teachers signed an editorial that was printed in the school newspaper on November 22, 2016. This editorial included statements such as, “in the wake of a disturbing example of racial hate speech at our school [contained in a Snapchat] and a historically divisive election, you’ve heard and read a lot of calls for unity of the school and the nation. This letter is not one of them” and “some people feel the election result has validated them to unleash their worst impulses.”<sup>1</sup> The teachers also wrote:

For our part, we’ll do everything we can to abide by these words by 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.”<sup>2</sup>

Clearly, this is a negative reaction to the election of President Trump. There are undoubtedly students at Edina High School whose parents voted for President Trump.<sup>3</sup> Yet the editorial signed by these teachers implicitly smears all students who are insufficiently anti-Trump as being responsible for the racist Snapchat sent by a student at Edina High School and an incident of racist graffiti at a neighboring high school.<sup>4</sup> I of course support disciplining the students who engaged in these repugnant acts, but that does not free teachers from their

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<sup>1</sup> John Hinderaker, “Edina Teachers Take Sides in Partisan Politics,” Center of the American Experiment, July 7, 2017, <https://www.americanexperiment.org/2017/07/edina-teachers-take-sides-partisan-politics/>.

<sup>2</sup> *Id.*

<sup>3</sup> “Minnesota Presidential Race Results: Hillary Clinton Wins,” N.Y. Times, Aug. 1, 2017 (presidential results updated as of Feb. 2017), <https://www.nytimes.com/elections/results/minnesota-president-clinton-trump>.

<sup>4</sup> John Hinderaker, “Edina Teachers Take Sides in Partisan Politics,” Center of the American Experiment, July 7, 2017, <https://www.americanexperiment.org/2017/07/edina-teachers-take-sides-partisan-politics/>; Beatrice Dupuy, “School disciplines student for racist messages in Maple Grove bathroom,” Minneapolis Star-Tribune, Nov. 22, 2016, <http://www.startribune.com/investigation-completed-in-racist-graffiti-found-at-maple-grove-senior-high-school/402472005/>.



obligations of professionalism and nondiscrimination toward those students who had nothing to do with those incidents.

This report seems to have touched a nerve, because a number of other parents submitted comments to the Center of the American Experiment regarding the treatment of their children within the Edina public schools. One mother wrote in an email to a school administrator (later shared with the Center for the American Experiment), “in my tenth grader’s AP World class, [the teacher] called out any Trump supporters and asked them to *assure the class that they weren’t racist*.”<sup>5</sup> A parent wrote that elementary school students are being instructed about so-called “white privilege.”<sup>6</sup> Another mother wrote:

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.<sup>7</sup>

I am also troubled by a news report that Edina High School’s Black Student Union does not allow white members. In the same Star-Tribune article, Principal Bruce Locklear, despite such exclusionary policies, expresses his and the school’s support for the Black Student Union. It should not be necessary to note that the school should not be supporting a racially exclusive club. According to the article, “For now, Edina’s Black Student Union is not inviting white memberships. ‘As much as allies are critical in these movements,’ Rivers said. ‘We didn’t want the space to ... become untrue or edited for whiteness so that is a big part of what we are working on now.’”<sup>8</sup> Imagine if this was the White Student Union, and the organization refused to allow black students with an interest in “white” culture to join because, “We didn’t want the space to become untrue or edited for blackness.” Would the principal of the school “rel[y] heavily on the [WSU] for guidance and leadership”? If the principal did, would the school board stand for it?

Title VI prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, period. That means that it also prohibits discrimination against white students. With a new school year about to start, I hope that

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<sup>5</sup> John Hinderaker, “Left-Wing Indoctrination in the Schools: It’s Worse Than You Think,” Powerline, July 13, 2017, <http://www.powerlineblog.com/archives/2017/07/left-wing-indoctrination-in-the-schools-its-worse-than-you-think.php>

<sup>6</sup> Tom Steward, “Edina Parents and Students Rebel Against Politics in Classroom,” Center of the American Experiment, July 11, 2017, <https://www.americanexperiment.org/2017/07/edina-parents-and-students-rebel-against-politics-in-classroom/>.

<sup>7</sup> John Hinderaker, “The Rebellion Against Left-Wing Politics in the Schools Continues, and It Isn’t Only Edina,” Center of the American Experiment, July 12, 2017, <https://www.americanexperiment.org/2017/07/rebellion-left-wing-politics-schools-continues-isnt-edina/>.

<sup>8</sup> Beatrice Dupuy, “Black students in suburban schools find strength, safe spaces together,” Minneapolis Star-Tribune, Dec. 10, 2016, <http://www.startribune.com/black-students-in-suburban-schools-find-strength-in-unions/405718276/>.



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you will remind the teachers, administrators, and students of this fact. I also hope that you will remind teachers that they serve as role models for how citizens should comport themselves, regardless of race, and that bullying students of different races or with different political beliefs is not how adults should behave.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Peter Kirsanow".

Peter Kirsanow  
Commissioner