

CLASS DIVIDED INTO "OPPRESSED" AND "OPPRESSOR"

School: Clay Middle School

Teacher: Liana Giles

Date: December 2020

Situation:

- Student confides in friend's parent about a class lesson
- Class was divided into OPPRESSOR and OPPRESSED
- White males were told they would have been "SLAVE OWNERS"
- Students who were "oppressed" were sent to lunch early, while the "oppressors" were held back a minute or two.
- Corroborated story with other students and parents who were in the class.
- Parents are afraid to speak out for fear of being targeted.
- Student received threats on social media to "kill themselves" when speaking against these types of lessons and no action was taken by the school.
- No reply has been made to an [email](#) to the principal and vice principal

[REDACTED]

A Concerning Incident in 8th Grade Social Studies

To: tcrosby@ccs.k12.in.us, Cc: [REDACTED] bcole2@ccs.k12.in.us, msmith@ccs.k12.in.us, [REDACTED]

[Details](#)

Good afternoon,

My name is Jennifer [REDACTED] and I am a parent of students at CCS. The purpose of this email is to share with you what I've come to understand about an incident in an 8th grade social studies class led by Ms. Giles at Clay Middle School. I am speaking on the behalf of a student and family who wishes to remain anonymous.

Before the holiday break, I was approached by a student of your school of whom I regularly see and am available to provide a listening ear. The student proceeded to confide in me about an occurrence in the classroom setting whereas the white students were asked to stand up and were told they would have likely been "slave-owners" and therefore "oppressors" during our country's founding. There was some discussion regarding "white privilege", a concept that is becoming more universally presented, but not universally accepted, in schools today. This teacher additionally has displayed political satire cartoons on her classroom walls for students to observe. Other parents are also aware of this incident but to my knowledge, the only complaint so far was voiced regarding the satirical cartoons. In today's political environment, there are concerns about retribution for those who speak out.

As a parent, I would like to share my perspective on the matter, as I will be participating in community-building events soon and will continue to help other families cope with the stresses they are encountering in school. Dividing students into categories of "oppressors" and the "oppressed", merely serves to tear down the civility and open-mindedness we expect in the classroom. Since the incident, the student is experiencing a level of trauma and despair in that their peers have begun to act aggressively towards or isolate them. Some students have gone so far as to repeatedly tell this student to kill himself on social media.

My ask of you is to help me understand which lesson plan is instructing students to learn "oppressor v. oppressed". I'm looking for Clay Middle School policy-specific information, not the state academic standards, which I have scoured to find the same language unsuccessfully. There are, however, school and state policies at odds with each other, in my view. This type of policy (or activity) goes against stated goals of "cultural competency", which is to *celebrate* and *learn* from each individual culture. What would be the purpose of the instruction beyond simply categorizing individuals based on the teacher's perception of skin color, ancestry, or cultural identification in an effort to alienate one side against the other? Are the teachers allowed to examine which cultural is "superior" to the others? What is the criteria for making such an adjudication?

As a parent, my goal is to understand the process by which our students are being (or will be) classified as "oppressor" or "oppressed" member of the school family so that we can offer the necessary psychological support to our children. If there is no such policy or lesson plan, I would like to understand what we can do to make sure that any future lessons offered in 8th grade social studies will be "inclusive" and "conducive" to *every* student's instructional learning goals, no matter what is assumed about their ancestry and cultural belonging. The lessons being taught in the classrooms have serious implications that you readily need to be aware of. Providing a backdrop for racial and cultural animosity without providing solutions where all students feel valued is setting the stage for potential devastating mental health disparities, bullying, and harassment. Until we fully understand the policies and curricula that drive these activities, we can not help our students to do better and feel safe in your school.

Again, thank you for taking the time to help me better understand the Clay Middle School policies regarding:

- Criteria for labeling students as "oppressor v. oppressed"
- Criteria for examining cultural identification (self-identify verbally, simply stand up when asked if white, answer questionnaire?)
- Inclusivity and conductivity of each student's instructional learning goals

It is so very important that you are aware of how school policies and lesson plans are being implemented inside of the classroom and how the students are experiencing the value or ramifications of those tools. Thank you for all you do, and I look forward to hearing from you.

Best Regards,