



MOMS FOR LIBERTY
WILLIAMSON COUNTY CHAPTER
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June 30, 2021

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Dr. Penny Schwinn, Commissioner
Tennessee Department of Education
710 James Robertson Parkway
Nashville, Tennessee 37243

RE: Complaint against Wit & Wisdom Curriculum Pursuant to TCA 49-6-10

Dear Dr. Schwinn,

Governor Bill Lee signed HB0580/SB0623 on 25 May 2021, codifying principles of equality and non-discrimination into Tennessee schools under SECTION 51, now Tennessee Code Annotated, Title 49, Chapter 6, Part 10, effective 1 July 2021, stating the following:

- a. A [Local Education Agency] LEA or public charter school shall not include or promote the following concepts as part of a course of instruction or in a curriculum or instructional program, or allow teachers or other employees of the LEA or public charter school to use supplemental instructional materials that include or promote the following concepts:
 1. One (1) race or sex is inherently superior to another race or sex;
 2. An individual, by virtue of the individual's race or sex, is inherently privileged, racist, sexist, or oppressive, whether consciously or subconsciously;
 3. An individual should be discriminated against or receive adverse treatment because of the individual's race or sex;
 4. An individual's moral character is determined by the individual's race or sex;
 5. An individual, by virtue of the individual's race or sex, bears responsibility for actions committed in the past by other members of the same race or sex;
 6. An individual should feel discomfort, guilt, anguish, or another form of psychological distress solely because of the individual's race or sex;
 7. A meritocracy is inherently racist or sexist, or designed by a particular race or sex to oppress members of another race or sex;
 8. This state or the United States is fundamentally or irredeemably racist or sexist;
 9. Promoting or advocating the violent overthrow of the United States government;
 10. Promoting division between, or resentment of, a race, sex, religion, creed, nonviolent political affiliation, social class, or class of people; or

11. Ascribing character traits, values, moral or ethical codes, privileges, or beliefs to a race or sex, or to an individual because of the individual's race or sex.

Furthermore, “if the commissioner of education finds that an LEA or public charter school knowingly violated this section, then the commissioner shall withhold state funds, in an amount determined by the commissioner, from the LEA or public charter school until the LEA or public charter school provides evidence to the commissioner that the LEA or public charter school is no longer in violation of this section.”

I submit that Williamson County Schools is in violation of this state law with the teaching of Great Minds PBC Wit & Wisdom (WW) English Language Arts (ELA) curriculum, Grade 2, Module 3, “Civil Rights Heroes” which includes the following anchor texts:

1. “Martin Luther King Jr and the March on Washington” by Frances E. Ruffin
2. “Ruby Bridges Goes to School: My True Story” by Ruby Bridges
3. “The Story of Ruby Bridges” by Robert Coles
4. “Separate is Never Equal” by Duncan Tonatiuh

The classroom books and teacher manuals reveal both explicit and implicit Anti-American, Anti-White, and Anti-Mexican teaching. Additionally, it implies to second grade children that people of color continue to be oppressed by an oppressive “angry, vicious, scary, mean, loud, violent, [rude], and [hateful]” white population (Attachment 1 – Teacher’s Manual) and teaches that the racial injustice of the 1960s exists today.

Without seeing all the materials involved in this module, one cannot begin to grasp the high level of manipulation being inflicted upon the young minds of impressionable second graders who do not yet have the level of maturity or capacity to think critically, nor enough knowledge of American history and experience to provide adequate context to the narrowly focused WW lessons.

For nine weeks, WW focuses repeatedly and daily on very dark and divisive slivers of American history. Without highlighting the positive achievements, like unity and the overall improvement of our country, students fail to learn and appreciate the continual progress in America and its accomplishments towards forming a more perfect union.

The narrow and slanted obsession on historical mistakes reveals a heavily biased agenda, one that makes children hate their country, each other, and/or themselves. This outcome has been proven with multiple parent testimonies of the negative change in behavior or outlook by their children. The relentless nature of how these divisive stories are taught, the lack of historical context and difference in perspective, and the manipulative pedagogy all work together to amplify and sow feelings of resentment, shame of one’s skin color, and/or fear.

What follows is an in-depth look at each book and associated teachings in WW Grade 2 Module 3.

Book 1, “Martin Luther King Jr. and the March on Washington,” shows the following images

1. Pages 22-23 show photographs of white firemen blasting black children to the point of “bruising their bodies and ripping off their clothes.”
2. Pages 18-19 show photographs of white and colored drinking fountains, asking “Which of these fountains looks nicer to you?”

The accompanying teacher’s manual goes on to teach the following:

1. Classroom Assessment 31A mandates that children are read aloud “When Peace Met Power” by Laura Helweg.
2. The *children who marched, sang, and prayed under blasting firehoses were acting nonviolently*. They showed the world the power of peaceful protest.
3. Nonviolence wasn’t an easy idea, especially for southern blacks. *They met hate every day, including from the all-white police force. They expected unfair arrests, beatings, or worse from police.*
4. To the black community, *one man stood for hate more than any other person in Birmingham*. Eugene “Bull” Connor was the Commissioner of Public Safety. *This meant that he led the police and fire departments. Connor used his job to maintain segregation and bully blacks.*
5. Lesson 30 teaches “Different Voices” by Anna Gratz Cockerville, detailing Lucille’s point of view of “firemen with hoses and water exploding” and “kids falling down,” with the photographer’s point of view of “water hitting the kids in the back,” and “water hurting the kids.”

Book 2, “Ruby Bridges Goes to School by Ruby Bridges,” shows the following images:

1. Pages 2-3 depict photographs of a neighborhood sign that reads “WE WANT WHITE TENANTS IN OUR WHITE COMMUNITY” and a smiling white boy holding a sign that says “We wont [sic] go to school with Negroes.”
2. Pages 14-15 shows a group of white people holding up signs that read, “We want segregation [sic]” and “We don’t want to Integrate.”
3. Pages 24-25 shows the Normal Rockwell painting *The Problem We All Live With*, depicting Ruby Bridges walking to school with the “N word” in the background.

The accompanying teacher’s manual goes on to teach the following:

1. It tells students to repeatedly focus on and emphasizes the racist images on pages 2-3.
2. Day 14 features a lesson on adjectives and emphasizes the photograph from pages 14-15. The teacher is instructed to “tell students that a big crowd of people that wants to be violent is called a mob. ...Then brainstorm adjectives as a class that could describe the mob.” The teacher’s manual lists “angry, scary, mean, loud” as suggested adjectives.
3. Instructs the teacher to point out the N-word in the Normal Rockwell painting on pages 24-25. “Use this opportunity to remind students that racial slurs are words people use to show disrespect and hatred towards people of different races.... People still use this word today as a hateful slur...Reinforce...how words can cause pain. Discuss how words can be used to attack and disrespect people.”

4. Instructs the teacher to point out this word whether or not the students notice it on their own, and to then lead a discussion about “emotionally charged language,” telling the teacher to not “expect an individual or group to serve as a ‘spokesperson’ for his or her race, gender, or any other group.” Guiding a teacher in this manner implies segregation of the classroom into “race, gender, or any other group.”

Book 3, “The Story of Ruby Bridges by Robert Coles”, shows the following images:

1. Pages 20-21 show images of white people yelling and protesting with accompanying text, “The crowd seemed ready to kill her.” “On Ruby’s first day, a large crowd of angry white people gathered... The people carried signs that said they didn’t want black children in a white school. People called Ruby names; some wanted to hurt her. The city and state police did not help Ruby... The marshals carried guns.”
2. Pages 12-13 show more white protesters surrounding young Ruby and reads, “Men and women and children shouted at her. They pushed toward her.”
3. The last page of the book depicts Ruby praying for God to forgive the [white] “mob,” because “they don’t know what they’re doing. So You could forgive them, just like You did those folks a long time ago when they said terrible things about You.”

The accompanying teacher’s manual goes on to teach the following:

1. On Day 15, a lesson on descriptive language instructs the teachers to describe white people with the adverb “rudely” and the adjective “vicious.”
2. Day 16 instructs the teacher to have the students write a “narrative from the point of view of Ruby Bridges,” in essence inflicting the psychological distress of Ruby’s experience onto present day students. It furthermore instructs students to role play Ruby’s experience.
3. Handout 19A: Narrative Comparison features the following narratives for careful examination and analysis:
 - a. Narrative #1 “I am going to the Frantz Elementary School. My mom is walking with me. I see many *white people* holding signs. *They do not want me to go to this school.* The marshals keep us safe. I am going to walk in the school quickly. I made it inside!”
 - b. Narrative #2 “I am scared to go to Frantz Elementary School. It makes me feel better to walk with my mom. I see many *white people yelling at us* and holding signs. *Why are they being so mean?* I don’t understand why they do not want me to go to this school. The marshals keep us safe. That makes me feel better too. *I want to cry*, but I will be brave...”
4. Lesson 33 provides a sample response on narrative revision: “Today I am quickly *walking to my new school...I see white people yelling loudly at us and holding signs. They do not want me to go to that school. I am scared.”
5. The final page of the book features Ruby’s prayer for the white mob. The use of these words pull directly from Luke 23:24 in which Jesus prays “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing,” thereby making a direct comparison between white people and those that crucified Jesus. The book makes no mention of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, desegregation, black heroes such as Justice Thurgood Marshall, Justice

Clarence Thomas, Jackie Robinson, Morgan Freeman, Gen Colin Powell, Secretary Condoleezza Rice, Secretary Ben Carson or President Barack Obama, or any of the subsequent progress America has made towards a “more perfect union.” Instead, 7–8-year-old children are left with a picture of America as a racist country, rife with injustice.

Book 4, “Separate is Never Equal” by Duncan Tonatiuh, shows the following images and accompanying text:

1. Pages 26-27 state [Mexican children are] inferior in their economic outlook, in their clothing, and in their ability to take part in the activities of the school...
2. On page 2, “...a young white boy pointed at her and yelled, ‘Go back to the Mexican school! You don’t belong here!’”
3. Page 26-27 state [Mexican children] are lacking in “social behavior. They need to learn cleanliness of mind, manner, and dress. ...They have problems with lice, impetigo, and tuberculosis. They have generally dirty hands, face, neck, and ears. Children at the Mexican school are inferior to whites in personal hygiene...and in their scholastic ability...[they are also inferior] In their economic outlook, in their clothing, and in their ability to take part in the activities of the school.” When one character asks another character, “Do you believe that white students are superior to Mexicans in the respects that you have mentioned?”, the other character responds, “Yes.”
4. Pages 14-15 shows imagery of the children at “the Mexican school,” sitting in dirt in front of an [unclean] “clapboard shack,” surrounded by a cow pasture complete with cow manure, electric fencing, and flies. “The students had to eat their lunch outside, and flies would land on their food. There was an electric wire that surrounded the pasture...If you touched it, you received a shock! The school did not have a playground – not even a swing.”
5. Pages 18-19 shows a public swimming pool with white children in the water. Mexican children are kept on the other side of bars with downward stares while a sign saying “No Dogs or Mexicans Allowed” is featured front and center.
6. The Mexican children are portrayed like animals behind bars, as inferior as dogs or cows, and the white people are portrayed as evil, superior oppressors.
7. The racist statements regarding Mexican children are never denounced as false in the subsequent pages.

The accompanying teacher’s manual goes on to teach the following:

1. Instructs teachers to place heavy emphasis on the racist imagery: “...introduce the text to students through the rich illustrations... the class will first Notice and Wonder only about the illustrations... Explain that you will move through the book slowly allowing each child to look at the pictures.”
2. Day 24 and 25 instructs students to observe and discuss the illustrations of the children behind the electric fence and behind bars at the public pool with the “No Dogs or Mexicans Allowed” sign.
3. Day 27: In answer to the question, why did the Mendez family fight for desegregation, the teachers manual offers “They fought so white people would stop thinking they were better than Mexican people.”

4. Day 27: After Sylvia's family fought for desegregation, Sylvia tells her mother, "I don't want to go to that school anymore. The [white] kids are mean."
5. Day 27 instructs students to "Write an exploded moment narrative from the point of view of Sylvia Mendez during the courtroom scene. Describe her response to injustice by describing her thoughts, feelings and actions in this moment." Again, this inflicts the emotional trauma experienced by young Sylvia onto the 2nd grade students participating in this class. Day 28 has them repeat this exercise again.
6. Day 30 offers students two narrative options: they can either write a narrative from Sylvia's point of view as she returns to the white school, or Ruby's point of view as she enters an empty classroom at the previously all-white school.

The word "injustice" is mentioned 314 times in a 478 page Teacher's Manual. Examples of teachings about injustice follow (if the number of the day is not annotated, then it was presented on Day 1 of Module 3):

1. "Develop a nonverbal signal for injustice"
2. "Students should signal throughout the module as they hear examples of injustice."
3. Lesson on prefixes: injustice, unequal, inequality, unfair
4. Lesson on suffixes: segregation
5. Vocabulary lesson: protest, refuse, and marching
6. "Point out the word injustice."
7. "Explain that unfair and injustice... mean the same thing."
8. "Injustice is a stronger word."
9. "Explain... how real people respond to injustice."
10. "Explore the word injustice."
11. "Reread...how can people respond to injustice?"
12. "Echo read... What injustices did people face before the civil rights act of 1964?"
13. "Point to the word injustice"
14. "Remind the class of the meaning of this word injustice"
15. "Explain ... read ... about people fighting injustice."
16. "Remind the class of the meaning of injustice."
17. "How can people respond to injustice?"
18. What does injustice mean?
19. "What do you remember about injustice?"
20. "What do you remember about... how can people respond to injustice?"
21. "What is an example of injustice?"
22. "Record the word injustice"
23. "Add their example of injustice."
24. "Investigate the injustices people faced and how they respond to injustice."
25. "What happens if we don't respond to injustices?"
26. "What will you do to make the world a more fair, or just, place?"
27. Day 5: "What makes a good protest song?"
28. Day 12: "What might a just world be?"
29. Day 32: How can "children" respond to injustice?
30. Day 33: "How can responding to injustice impact the world?"
31. Day 34: "Why is it important to respond to injustices?"

32. Emphasize: “The struggle for equal rights continues to this day.”

From January to March, 34 lessons daily drill common themes into 7- and 8-year-old children via classroom books, readings, assessments, vocabulary lessons, grammar exercises, narrative writing, imagery focus, role playing, and class discussion:

1. White people are bad.
2. People of color are mistreated (by white people).
3. America is unjust.
4. Police officers (and firemen) target people of color.

This explicit and implicit indoctrination--the relentless teachings of whites versus people of color under the dichotomy of oppressor versus oppressed and that our country is fundamentally racist—is prohibited under section (a) of Tennessee State Law, Title 49, Chapter 6, Part 10: Items 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 10, 11. Per section (c), it is the role of the commissioner of education to withhold state funds from the LEA until the LEA provides evidence that it is no longer in violation of this section.

There are documented examples of the negative psychological effects this instruction has had on Williamson County children in the 2020-2021 school year. Attachment 2 features parent testimony regarding her 2nd grade biracial son who is now ashamed of his white half, his white father, and his country. Attachment 3 gives parent testimony of her 2nd grade black son who now sees himself as oppressed because of his skin color. There does not have to be a textbook labeled “Critical Race Theory” for its harmful tenets to be present in a curriculum; the evidence is present in the outcome. Some children are seeing counselors to overcome the emotional trauma inflicted upon them by what they learned in Tennessee public education. It must stop.

History must be taught through an objective lens and complex subjects presented at an age where they can be analyzed and understood in appropriate historical context. Targeting elementary age children with daily lessons on fighting past injustices as if they were occurring in present day violates Tennessee law and will sow the seeds of racial strife, neo-racism, neo-segregation, and is an affront to the ideals of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

The parents and grandparents of Moms for Liberty Williamson County implore your immediate attention on this matter as the 2021-2022 school year fast approaches.

Sincerely,

Robin E. Steenman
Chair, Williamson County Moms for Liberty

3 Attachments:

1. Great Minds Wit & Wisdom, Grade 2 Module 3 Teacher's Manual: (web address)
https://www.greatminds.org/hubfs/Review%20Files/Florida%20Review%20Files/2020%20Wit%20and%20Wisdom/WW_FLORIDA_Grade2_Module3.pdf
2. Letter from [REDACTED], mother of Williamson County 2nd grader
3. Letter from [REDACTED], mother of Williamson County 2nd grader

[REDACTED]

Jason Golden
Jasong@wcs.edu
Williamson County Schools Superintendent

March 23, 2021

Superintendent Golden,

Over the past few months my husband and I have become very concerned about the new ELA curriculum, Wit & Wisdom, that has been implemented this school year for our 2nd grader at [REDACTED] Elementary. He is currently in the online class. The new curriculum has a high intensity focus on race that is highly inappropriate for 7- and 8-year-old children. We are a bi-racial family, Asian and White. This class has been very harmful to our son's identify and self-esteem. Our son never questioned his race or identity until this curriculum. Now, he tells us that he isn't American, he isn't white. He is Thai. He is ashamed of his white half.

I have shared my concerns with Principal [REDACTED]. She assured me that she would share my concerns with her superiors. I continue to see no change in the curriculum and no additional communication from the school or administration.

The story of Dr. King and his 'I have a Dream' speech is beautiful and uplifting. This is the world that our child lived in until now. He was color blind. But this Wit & Wisdom curriculum has changed that. It is far more harmful than helpful. It depresses him. It is dark and divisive. It paints a picture of a world with only white and black people. It paints a picture of poor black people being attacked by evil white people. Our child is only shown evidence of how evil white people are to black people and Native Americans. Some of the stories that his class spent months reviewing and studying include:

- The Story of Ruby Bridges, the first black student to integrate New Orleans public schools. The aggressive white mob held signs with ugly words protesting her presence.
- The young high schoolers who went to eat at a white only diner and were refused service and attacked with boiling coffee down their backs and ketchup thrown in their faces.
- White firemen in Birmingham sprayed young black kids against a wall with hoses ripping off their clothes and leaving bruises on their bodies.

During the initial presentation of Ruby Bridges' story the teacher asked my son, "How would you feel if you were Ruby?" My son responded, "I would be happy to be with 3 hitmen to protect me." The teacher pressed, "No, how did Ruby feel?". My son responded, "She was sad

and nervous to meet the new teacher". Again, this was not the answer the teacher was looking for. She went on to ask another student.

On a Flex-Day our son was assigned to read the story about the high schoolers who were attacked and refused service in a diner. We read it together. His response was "this story is so sad".

This content has been used for months to teach reading, writing and analysis. These are very dark topics for 2nd graders to spend the majority of their time learning. This has been going on for weeks and weeks and now months. It is depressing. Our son is not getting anything out of this other than the shame of being half white. He has come to hate his class and his school because of this curriculum being allowed in a second-grade classroom. It is certainly not age appropriate for 2nd graders to learn this content at this young age. With the proper context this content could be appropriate for middle schoolers or high schoolers, who have a far greater level of maturity to consider and evaluate past injustices based on our present-day values.

We demand that this curriculum cease immediately. We expect 2nd graders to learn basic educational concepts and not be force fed story after story of racial aggressions and evils committed in the past. This is not how we create a better world for our children. This curriculum only highlights race and creates further division among the new generation. We want our child to be colorblind and value people for who they are and not the color of their skin or for past evils and mistakes committed by other people in history. We want a program that unites people, not one that divides people into categories.

We have spoken with and read social media comments from other WCS parents that also have issues with the new curriculum across elementary grade levels. It seems like the majority feel the curriculum is repetitive and moves too slowly to hold the attention of students in K-1 and addresses topics inappropriate for grade levels 2-5. When inappropriate, depressing topics continue for weeks, they negatively impact our students as we have directly experienced. Life for students during COVID has been depressing enough.

Mr. Golden, we ask that you set up either an in-person or a zoom meeting with us, the principal, school board representative, and an appropriate person in charge of curriculum, so we can discuss how to prevent future harm from this curriculum. We would also like to invite additional parents with whom we have spoken to join us as well so you can hear from parents across grade levels. We believe that together we can solve this issue. We look forward to hearing from you or your assistant regarding a meeting. Thank you for your time and attention to this most important matter that affects not only our child, but so many young children in our school system.

Best Regards,

██████████

June 30, 2021

To Whom it May Concern,

I am a mom of three children and moved to Williamson County to get the best education for my children. My daughter, who is now in middle school, finished her elementary school where my son who is 8 and my little daughter who is 6 years old is going. I never had any problems until my son started his 2nd grade with Wit & Wisdom curriculum. Here is my story.

We chose an online class for the first semester due to the pandemic.

I was with my son from every day of his class and I got a chance to hear what he was learning. One day he finished his class in the morning, as usual, and started on his homework. My son, who is so bright and smart, would always like to check his grades as soon as he submitted his homework to see how he did. That day the question format wasn't "choose the correct answer," which always shows the result as soon as it is submitted. That day's "answer the following" format doesn't show the result immediately, as the teacher must check it manually.

My son was so upset to not see his grade as soon as he was accustomed to and my son turned his face to me and said, "Mommy it is not fair...If the student is white, the grade will show up right away, but if the students are black or brown like me, the grade won't show up and it will only give us 'submitted.'"

I was so shocked with what I heard and I asked him, "who told you all this?" because this has never been a topic in my family. He said, "from what I have learned online mommy."

My son also kept telling us a story of Harriet Tubman, Ruby Bridges and how unfair they were treated and he constantly says with a sad face, "this is not fair - people have to be tested equally." All he understood is because he is not white, he is not going to be treated equally because that is what he has been learning in his school.

I had never connected the dots on how this curriculum is damaging my child until one of the brave moms from my neighborhood sent me the video presentation she did for the school board and I said "this is exactly what is happening in my house, too!"

I tried to tell my story in person at the June school board meeting. However, the one-minute time limit given per person didn't allow me to finish.

I appreciate the time and effort the school board puts into protecting the safety of our children. However, this curriculum is destroying our children and my son is one of many. So I call on you out loud to consider this serious issue and discontinue teaching the Wit & Wisdom curriculum in our children's schools.

I look forward to hearing from you on this matter. If you would like to discuss this further, please contact me at your earliest convenience at [REDACTED].

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

[REDACTED]

Franklin, Tennessee