

bridge the DIVIDE

COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS. RACIAL RECONCILIATION.

July 14, 2021

Dear Mr. Farner and Ms. Rose,

This letter constitutes a pupil nondiscrimination complaint under Wis Admin Code PI 9.04 and Cedarburg Board Policy 2260. Under PI 9.04(2), any resident of the school district can file such a complaint. I am filing a complaint as a resident of the Cedarburg school district. Consistent with state law, Cedarburg Board Policy 2260 states that it is "intended to support and promote nondiscriminatory practices in all district and school activities," including "selection of instructional and library media materials in a nondiscriminatory manner and that reflect the cultural diversity and pluralistic nature of American society." I am filing this complaint because the Cedarburg School District has not met its responsibility under its own policies and under state law to provide a diverse curriculum.

Specifically, state law requires the following:

Wis Admin Code Sec. PI 9.03 Policies.

- o (1) Each board shall develop policies prohibiting discrimination against pupils. The policies shall include the following areas:
- o (e) An instructional and library media materials selection policy consistent with s. 121.02 (1) (h), Stats., and s. PI 8.01 (2) (h).

"§118.01(2)(c)(7. and 8.), Wis Stats.

- o Educational goals and expectations.
- o (2) EDUCATIONAL GOALS. . .each school board shall provide an instructional program designed to give pupils:
 - o 7. An appreciation and understanding of different value systems and cultures.
 - o 8. At all grade levels, an understanding of human relations, particularly with regard to American Indians, Black Americans and Hispanics."

"§121.02, Wis Stats.

- o School district standards.
- o (1) Except as provided in §118.40 (2r)(d), each school board shall:
- o (h) Provide adequate instructional materials, texts and library services which reflect the cultural diversity and pluralistic nature of American society.
- o (l)4. Beginning September 1, 1991, as part of the social studies curriculum, include instruction in the history, culture, and tribal sovereignty of the federally recognized American Indian tribes and bands located in this state at least twice in the elementary grades and at least once in the high school grades."

Cedarburg Board Policy 2210 also speaks to the District's duty to provide a diverse curriculum. It says:

The School Board recognizes its responsibility for the quality of the educational program of the schools. To this end, the curriculum shall be developed, evaluated, and adopted on a continuing basis and in accordance with a plan for curriculum growth established by the Superintendent.

...

The Board directs that the curriculum of this District:

...

- I. provides that, in the social studies curriculum, instruction in the history, culture, and tribal sovereignty of Federally-recognized American Indian tribes and bands located in Wisconsin takes place at least twice in the elementary grades and once in the high school grades;
- J. provides for multicultural education by including, at each level, courses or units which help students understand the culture and contributions of various ethnic groups comprising American society, including, but not limited to Euro- Americans, African-Americans, Asian-Americans, Hispanic-Americans, and Native-Americans.

We believe that the Cedarburg school district has not complied with these legal requirements. Please find below interactions where we urged the leadership at CSD to make improvements:

- One of the first contacts from Bridge the Divide to CSD in 2018 we encouraged "...members of the community to educate themselves about differing perspectives in effort to create empathy and a deeper understanding of the root cause and potential solutions to racial tensions in Metro Milwaukee, specifically Ozaukee county. This divide is real and difficult to bridge without a multifaceted approach to solving a seemingly invisible problem...Another opportunity that we see, is partnering with the school district in a review and evaluation of how the history and lives of people of color are taught to our children. We believe that wrong thinking about the "other" - races and cultures -can be perpetuated in formative years when students living in a homogeneous and affluent neighborhood, like Cedarburg, are exposed to incorrect historical facts, lack discussion on diversity, or worse, the exposure is nonexistent. We would like to engage in curriculum meetings/review and other related discussion from elementary through high school in the Cedarburg School district and assist in a joint effort to raise our children to desire equality, diversity, and unity well before we release them out into the world as adults."
- We did try to engage the curriculum director and one of our most recent emails included the need for a "...discussion about equity in the curriculum as it relates to Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC)...the importance of reviewing curriculum for Black/Brown images and protagonists. About avoiding stereotypes, tokenism, and coded language. We were hoping to promote a curriculum that shows the value of BIPOC in our history, our present, and our future. We were hoping that CSD would complete an audit or self-assessment and then share how our district selects/approves of curriculum that is culturally relevant and racially literate. "
- A 2012 CHS graduate partnered with us in urging change "As I sit here, I find I cannot begin to express my frustration with the Cedarburg School District. How can I begin to address the harm I have unintentionally caused to classmates, colleagues, friends, and strangers as a result of my ignorance about the history of race in America? ...You have to understand that most of your students will leave Cedarburg. That's what you're educating them for, right? To go to college, to go out and make a difference in their country and in the world. You are categorically failing each of the students you graduate from your school system when you refuse to educate them about the racist history of their own country and of their own community...I want to acknowledge the work of Bridge the Divide in creating this petition and demanding what should absolutely be a foregone conclusion in this, the third decade of the 21st century. Without their remarkable effort, I might have been content to continue to let well enough alone, forget I ever lived in Cedarburg, and therefore do a disservice to future generations of public school students who will someday fly away from the bubble. In addition to the demands of this petition, I request that the School Board releases a concrete plan for addressing gaps in the current curriculum for the upcoming school year."

Despite these efforts, the district did not make any changes to increase the diversity of its curriculum. We also believe that efforts by faculty to include/incorporate more diverse texts and supplementary materials were rejected.

Our belief that the district is not meeting its legal obligation to provide a diverse and representative curriculum is born out by the district's response to two recent open records requests. In the first, we asked the district to provide records showing its compliance with the legal requirement to teach about Tribal Nations of Wisconsin. The district provided no records showing it meets this requirement. In the second, we asked the district to provide documentation demonstrating its compliance with the legal requirement under §121.02, Wis Stats., to provide instructional materials that "reflect the cultural diversity and pluralistic nature of American society." Again, the district provided no records showing compliance with this requirement.

Copies of each open records request, comments gleaned from our June 2020 petition and an email from a graduate who writes that "uncomfortable truths that are too frequently omitted from our history curricula" are attached. I can also make the names and contact info of additional witnesses available upon request.

In conclusion, the district is discriminating against its diverse students and violating state law by failing to provide an appropriately diverse curriculum. Consistent with PI 9.04, we expect a determination of this complaint within 90 days. Please keep us informed of the status of the investigation and decision-making process or any proposed action prior to such action being taken.

Sincerely,

Erica Turner

Executive Director, Bridge the Divide

Heidi Wheeler

Associate Director, Bridge the Divide