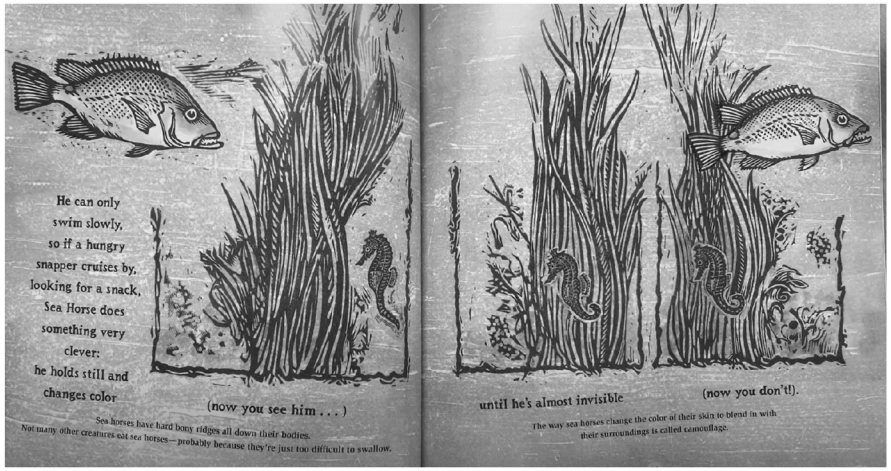
From: Betsy Hester <[redacted]>
Sent: 7/10/2021 6:50:12 AM
To: Eric Welch <[redacted]>
Subject: Re: WCS Curriculum Review
Attachments: image.png, image.png

Thanks
Betsy Hester

From: Eric Welch <[redacted]>
Sent: Thursday, July 8, 2021 10:34 AM
To: Beth Lothers <[redacted]>; Gregg Lawrence <[redacted]>; Jason Golden <[redacted]>
Cc: County Commissioners <[redacted]>; Angela Durham <[redacted]>; Daniel Cash <[redacted]>; Eliot Mitchell <[redacted]>; Brad Fiscus <[redacted]>; Jennifer Aprea <[redacted]>; Jay Galbreath <[redacted]>; Sheila Cleveland <[redacted]>; Candace Emerson <[redacted]>; Rick Wimberly <[redacted]>; KC Haugh <[redacted]>; Nancy Garrett <[redacted]>; [redacted] <[redacted]>; [redacted] <[redacted]>; Glen Casada <[redacted]>; [redacted] <[redacted]>; [redacted] <[redacted]>; Rogers Anderson <[redacted]>
Subject: Re: WCS Curriculum Review

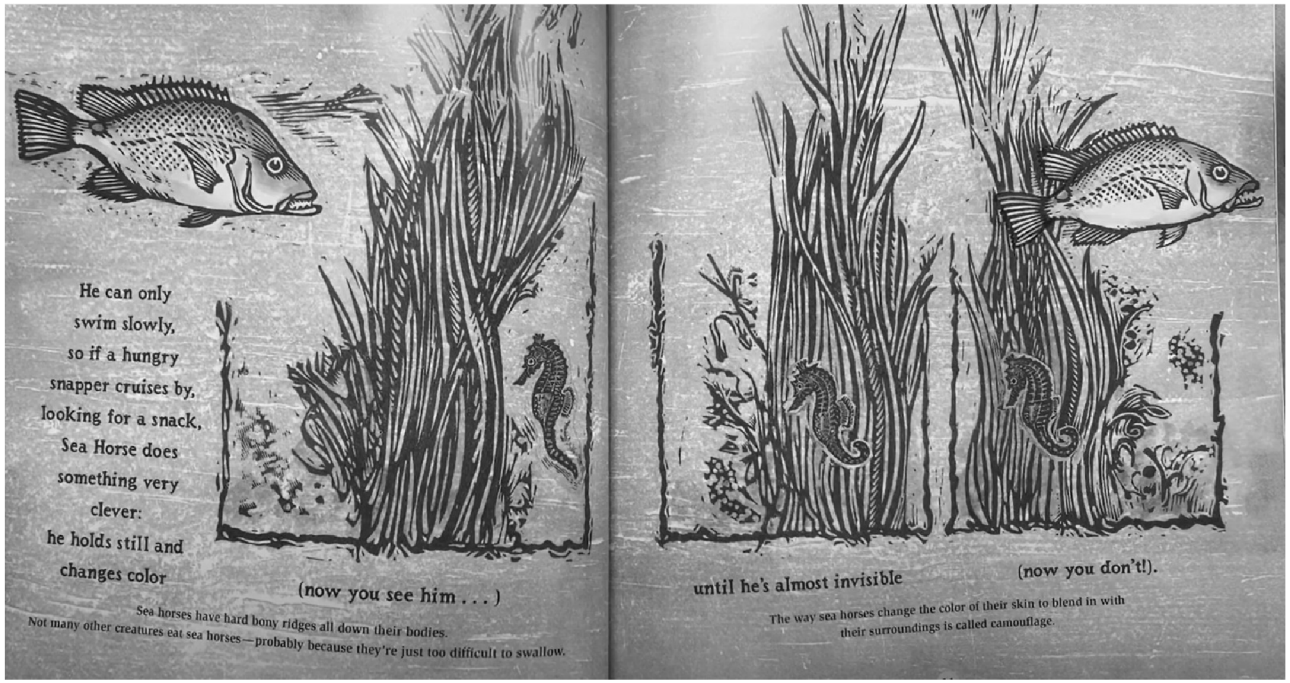
Commissioner Lothers, I appreciate you forwarding that PDF and found it helpful. If you or any other members of the County Commission are interested in reading *Ruby Bridges Goes to School*, it's available on YouTube here:

https://www.nps.gov/chsc/learn/education/upload/rubybridgeseducation.pdf



As are several of the other texts that Ms. Steenman and her group have raised concerns over, including *Seahorse, the Shyest Fish in the Sea*.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IieGK8mtdQc



The *Hatchet* book is not on Youtube but I suspect Central Office can provide you a copy if interested, as they did for me. Hatchet was written in 1986 and among its numerous awards is the John Newberry Medal given by the American Library Association for "the most distinguished contributions to American literature for children" and is entering its fifth decade of use in American classrooms. It is in the wilderness survival genre along with other literary classics like *Call of the Wild* and *Swiss Family Robinson*.

Anecdotally, when I brought a copy home my college-aged son who isn't the most voracious of readers, noticed it in my hand and commented that he remembered reading it during grade school (in FSSD prior to attending WCS for High School) and how much he had enjoyed it back then.

Warm Regards,
Eric

Eric Welch
Williamson County Schools
Board of Education - District 10

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From: Beth Lothers <[redacted]>
Sent: Saturday, July 3, 2021 8:03 AM
To: Gregg Lawrence <[redacted]>; Jason Golden <[redacted]>
Cc: County Commissioners <[redacted]>; Angela Durham <[redacted]>; Daniel Cash <[redacted]>; Eliot Mitchell <[redacted]>; Brad Fiscus <[redacted]>; Jennifer Aprea <[redacted]>; Jay Galbreath <[redacted]>; Sheila Cleveland <[redacted]>; Candace Emerson <[redacted]>; Rick Wimberly <[redacted]>; Eric Welch <[redacted]>; KC Haugh <[redacted]>; Nancy Garrett <[redacted]>; [redacted] <[redacted]>; [redacted] <[redacted]>; Glen Casada <[redacted]>; [redacted] <[redacted]>; [redacted] <[redacted]>; Rogers Anderson <[redacted]>
Subject: Re: WCS Curriculum Review

Happy 4th of July! An email mentioned Ruby Bridges. In my patriotic exercise, I found this PDF and found it inspiring. A six

year old and a Norman Rockwell painting that is worth a thousand words, helped us better see and understand others, as well as ourselves.

https://www.nps.gov/chsc/learn/education/upload/rubybridgeseducation.pdf

Enjoy!

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From: Gregg Lawrence <[redacted]>
Sent: Friday, July 2, 2021 5:33:14 PM
To: Jason Golden <[redacted]>
Cc: County Commissioners <[redacted]>; Angela Durham <[redacted]>; Daniel Cash <[redacted]>; Eliot Mitchell <[redacted]>; Brad Fiscus <[redacted]>; Jennifer Aprea <[redacted]>; Jay Galbreath <[redacted]>; Sheila Cleveland <[redacted]>; Candace Emerson <[redacted]>; Rick Wimberly <[redacted]>; Eric Welch <[redacted]>; KC Haugh <[redacted]>; Nancy Garrett <[redacted]>; [redacted] <[redacted]>; [redacted] <[redacted]>; Glen Casada <[redacted]>; [redacted] <[redacted]>; [redacted] <[redacted]>; Rogers Anderson <[redacted]>
Subject: Re: WCS Curriculum Review

Jason
Thank you so much for responding to my email some of this information was very helpful and helping me understand better how they Wit and Wisdom curriculum was adopted at WCS.

In my comments I should have said that I am not saying that WCS is not promoting American values or the many benefits of our constitutional republic. What I am saying is that there are other systems and certainly at the university level there are anti-American sentiments being taught and we can see the results in our culture, and certainly in the broader culture there is a significant negative narrative that makes it a huge challenge for a school system. My comments were more to say if we are going to replace this curriculum that there are some ideals that I think we should include.

We have to be aware that many of the writers of the various curriculum options likely have been exposed to some of this at the university level and some of them may hold those sentiments, and those may come through in some of the themes of the curriculum. One issue where MFL makes a great point is the money trail involved with many of the various curriculum options and particularly how Bill Gates has an enormous influence. Mr Gates is not a man whose values line up with what I would say is the majority opinion of Williamson County.

Regarding Wit and Wisdom, I have heard from the governors office today and there is some action at the state level that we may hear more about in the coming weeks. I think that is great because whatever we do with his curriculum needs to be in conjunction with and coordinated with the state, especially in regards to the new state law.

I do have a question about the WCS board review committee and how much authority they actually have. Can they decide that they want to get rid of a book and replace it with something else or can they only say that the teachers need to be cautious in teaching certain sections? How do you replace books in a curriculum since the whole modules revolve around the books? Opt out rights should certainly be a parental right though not ideal since the have the effect of ostracizing the child.

I don’t have a problem with Teaching about Ruby Bridges as it is a historical event, but I think it should be done at a more age-appropriate level than second grade which is what my understanding it is currently taught. That is more of a fifth grade conversation. Certainly books like Charlotte’s Web and Old Yeller contained the reality of death, but they did not include some of the unnecessary graphic detail as some of the texts I reviewed.

The book The Hatchet contains themes of adultery and suicide. I just don't see any redeeming value in this book being used in an elementary curriculum. I did not read the whole book, but If the review committee thinks there is redeeming value in teaching it I would like to hear their reasoning.

I think the fact that you are already planning to make some changes does prove that MFL has provided some valid objections to the curriculum. I do know your job and the job of everyone on the school board is very challenging in this regard because there are a lot of different opinions especially right now in America. I do commend you for listening to the parents and making some changes that you think are appropriate. We will know more about the states opinion in the coming weeks.

I hope have a great Fourth of July weekend and to all of the school board and commissioners I am copying here!

Most Respectfully

Gregg Lawrence

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From: Jason Golden <[redacted]>
Sent: Friday, July 2, 2021 11:45:40 AM
To: Gregg Lawrence <[redacted]>
Cc: County Commissioners <[redacted]>; Angela Durham <[redacted]>; Daniel Cash <[redacted]>; Eliot Mitchell <[redacted]>; Brad Fiscus <[redacted]>; Jennifer Aprea <[redacted]>; Jay Galbreath <[redacted]>; Sheila Cleveland <[redacted]>; Candace Emerson <[redacted]>; Rick Wimberly <[redacted]>; Eric Welch <[redacted]>; KC Haugh <[redacted]>; Nancy Garrett <[redacted]>; [redacted] <[redacted]>; [redacted] <[redacted]>; Glen Casada <[redacted]>; [redacted] <[redacted]>; [redacted] <[redacted]>; Rogers Anderson <[redacted]>
Subject: RE: WCS Curriculum Review

Commissioner,
Thanks for letting me know that you attended a presentation from some community members on curriculum. Our most recent Board Work Session gave a detailed description of the curriculum selection process at the State and local level, and we have had that posted on our website since June 18, the day after the meeting. I encourage you to look at that as well. Among other things, our discussion makes it clear that this adoption was well thought out by our professionals, and our teachers chose this curriculum by a significant majority as they compared Wit and Wisdom to other State selections; this process was not in any way shortened or altered due to COVID. Our teachers chose Wit and Wisdom by about a 3:1 margin over the second choice. The livestream link to the meeting is: https://livestream.com/accounts/5076979/events/9717864. We also have posted a webpage that gives curriculum information, including FAQs and all the texts and materials used in our elementary ELA curriculum. Here's a link to that: https://www.wcs.edu/domain/1416. I also encourage you to speak to your district Board member about issues when you have concerns.
Here are some key items regarding the current curriculum discussion:

- **WCS' curriculum does promote the values of our nation.** We start that in Kindergarten and continue it through high school graduation.
  - The first two social studies concept students are taught in their first Kindergarten quarter are (1) "Students will learn the foundations of good citizenship, including: civic responsibilities and patriotism through the rules by which they live, the authority figures within their community and the United States, and national symbols", and (2) "Teachers will honor the U.S. Constitution and recognize its significance and purpose." Our entire scope and sequence is posted at: https://www.wcs.edu/domain/1189.
  - Two and a half years after students start learning of the quality of our governmental system, Wit and Wisdom's third quarter ELA selections include a second grade module on civil rights heroes. This includes the story of Ruby Bridges, a first grader who was celebrated by Norman Rockwell. That short book starts with the line "A long time ago, some people thought…" and includes this line: "The United States government said: 'Segregation is wrong.'" This book describes a historical period in our country during which U.S. leaders improved our nation.
  - At different points in the K-5 curriculum, our students are taught the good work that our predecessors did to make our country what it is, dating back to the Revolutionary War and including the civil rights era of the 1960s. Again, the webpage has a list of all the materials, including the patriotic materials included in the ELA curriculum. Since it's the story of people, it includes some factual information on human imperfection, but the overall story is one of American success.

- **WCS' ELA Adoption was approved by the State Department of Education.** You mentioned the State's adoption process. We have also heard that the State's first process left no curriculum approved, so they started over. When their list came out for local review, Wit and Wisdom grades 3-8 was on their list of approved curricula. Like many other districts, we heard that K-2 would be approved through a waiver if a phonics component was added. Since this was the case, we included it as an option for our teachers.
  - WCS was one of 34 districts statewide that received approval for K-2 Wit and Wisdom through that process. The majority of our teachers chose it.

- According to the State's list, 72 districts received a total of 116 waivers for various ELA curricula. Over a dozen different products were approved by the State for some districts through an official waiver.
- In my experience, this State approval process is in keeping with a longstanding State commitment to local decision-making so long as the instructional materials are aligned to Tennessee standards.
- We have also heard that other curricula approved in other districts have been criticized for content; shifting to something else may not eliminate the content concerns you have expressed, because everyone has their own opinions on literature.

- **In the first year of adoption, we review curriculum and make adjustments that our trained professionals determine need to be made.** The State's adoption cycle is for six years, but the first year typically includes significant adjustments. When our professionals actually teach the material, they find elements of curriculum materials that might not have jumped out at them with the initial review. They see how different students respond, what individuals might focus on, the progression of the curriculum over the course of the year, etc. As a result of this, we make changes over the first year after our professionals determined that some grade level content needed to change.
  - We are eliminating and adjusting some of the reading selections as a result of feedback from our teachers, and the webpage link I gave you earlier includes some of those changes.
  - Our professionals know how to appropriately address sensitive passages in literature in an age-appropriate manner. One key point I think has been missed by so many non-educators in the recent discussions is that our professionals have worked their entire careers with literature that has elements that may be seen as inappropriate to some, that if a person focuses on a short passage, alters their inflection, gathers multiple passages together, etc., many books can be unjustly criticized. That's been true for generations.
    - Even those not involved in education have heard of challenges to Mark Twain's books, Harper Lee's To Kill a Mockingbird, criticism of some Dr. Seuss selections, etc. based on a focus on a portion of each book's content. I think many of us would be surprised to go back to some of our readings as young students and see content that we might think now is objectionable, especially if we search for interpretations that could be objectionable then gather every potentially objectionable passage from every book together. I mentioned to someone last week that even Charlotte's Web, a classic piece of literature for younger grades that most adults know, mentions egg sacs, death, slaughter, children with a dead mother, etc. If taken out of context, portions of that book can be argued to promote biology that's too early for young readers, destruction of American agricultural ideals, criticism of the value of family, etc. But that's not the way our professional teachers teach.

- **We have a Reconsideration of Instructional Materials process that has been initiated.**
  - The group whose meeting you attended has asked that Wit and Wisdom be eliminated. That request includes specific criticism of about 30 of the 130 or so pieces of literature in grades K-5. Many of those specific criticisms our professionals have reviewed and come to different conclusions from what you heard at the meeting you attended. This is in large part because of what I said above, the way some of those passages are read, with a focus on those specific passages that our teachers don't give in class, with a different interpretation of context from our professionals, by compiling all these sentences together without reading the entire book, etc. However, we acknowledge that perspectives differ and deserve respect, so we don't end the discussion there.
  - We have a policy that establishes a committee to review challenges to instructional material. Here's the policy link: https://onedrive.live.com/view.aspx?resid=C425CC264269ABEF!5757&ithint=file%2cdocx&authkey=!AJdVcG6scluRT34. That committee includes a parent PTO President, a Principal, a teacher chosen by the local education association, and a Board member.
  - The committee work will include direct discussions with those challenging the curriculum, but their work starts with the committee members reading all the challenged books.
  - One key value of this committee is that they look at the challenged material from a perspective other than from our instructional professionals.
  - Some additional changes may result from this review.

- **There is a new law that didn't exist when the State approved ELA Curriculum for every local district.** Public Chapter No. 493 includes prohibitions against curriculum that promotes concepts such as "an individual, by virtue of the individual's race or sex, is inherently privileged, racist…", that "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...", etc.
  - We haven't been promoting these concepts even before the law passed, and we are committed to following this law. We are continuing our review of the curriculum with this new law in mind.
  - That law actually puts the responsibility on the Commissioner of Education to determine if there is a violation of the law. The law includes the possibility of a financial penalty if the Commissioner determines a district is violating it.
  - The Department of Education has approved WCS' curriculum adoption, along with approving every other district's curriculum across the State, and they have let districts know that they will give direction on this new law in August. Since they are the approving agency and have this legislature-given authority, we will of course honor their directives.

Throughout history, people have disagreed on elements of curriculum. Our approach to these differences is to honor the State standards, use our professionals' judgment to do right by our students, and have a review process as a double-check on both. A request to eliminate books in our free society deserves a thoughtful, respectful review. That's what we're doing.

Jason Golden
Superintendent
Williamson County Schools
[redacted]

From: Gregg Lawrence <[redacted]>
Sent: Thursday, July 1, 2021 10:49 AM
To: Jason Golden <[redacted]>
Cc: County Commissioners <[redacted]>; Angela Durham <[redacted]>; Daniel Cash <[redacted]>; Eliot Mitchell <[redacted]>; Brad Fiscus <[redacted]>; Jennifer Aprea <[redacted]>; Jay Galbreath <[redacted]>; Sheila Cleveland <[redacted]>; Candace Emerson <[redacted]>; Rick Wimberly <[redacted]>; Eric Welch <[redacted]>; KC Haugh <[redacted]>; Nancy Garrett <[redacted]>; [redacted]; [redacted]; Glen Casada <[redacted]>; [redacted]; [redacted]; Rogers Anderson <[redacted]>
Subject: WCS Curriculum Review

Dear Jason,

A few weeks ago I attended an informational session sponsored by the Moms for Liberty on the Wit and Wisdom curriculum that is currently being taught at WCS. There were several things that I learned about the curriculum that I found very disturbing.

First of all, I learned that this curriculum failed the state textbook review boards twice before it was approved and only then after the board makeup was apparently changed to include some new members that were more favorable towards a curriculum of this type. I understand that last spring was a very difficult time for the WCS administration and that textbook evaluation was not the priority issue at the time, but that is not the case this year. This year, we should fully have our eyes open and it is incredulous to me that we would even consider using a curriculum that had so many deficiencies that it failed our state review committees twice.

I personally read through some of the books that were on display that are part of this curriculum and found many instances of graphic descriptions of events like miscarriage and death, suicide and other dark and depressing themes that were completely inappropriate for elementary age students and even beyond that. Are these things realities of life, yes, but whatever happened to the idea of giving a child the gift of an innocent childhood as much as possible and protecting their young minds from such content until they are mature enough to handle it. Primarily that should be the parents role, but most certainly that should be a top priority of WCS when parents entrust their children to the schools for their learning and development.

I read this alarming article recently that Children's Colorado had declared a state of emergency due to a 90% increase in attempted suicide among children in the Aurora area:

https://www.beckershospitalreview.com/patient-flow/overrun-with-kids-attempting-suicide-children-s-colorado-declares-state-of-emergency.html?origin=BHRE&utm_source=BHRE&utm_medium=email&utm_content=newsletter&oly_enc_id=5023B1694890G7Z

While thankfully we have not seen a crises of this level in Williamson County we have to be aware of that our children have been impacted by the events of the past year and many of them may be struggling to make sense of it. In my opinion, the texts that I read could have a severely negative impact on a child struggling with poor mental health and that I find a very serious problem.

There are many references to justice and social justice in this curriculum. Some of this content may place WCS in jeopardy of being in violation of the new state law that was just passed regarding curriculum guidelines. I don't see any reason why we would want to take that risk.

While I am not on the school board, as a County Commissioner and a citizen I care deeply about children in our community. They are the future of our nation. If I were on the school board, I would insist that the curriculum include 3 foundational principles:

1. **Promote a love for American and the principles on which America was founded**

   In 2020 we witnessed some of the most violent rioting in American history with over $2 billion in property damage. One of the things these young rioters have in common is that they don't seem to see anything worth preserving about America. Where did they get such an attitude? Many of them learned it from our public schools and universities. When you teach children that America is and has always been a fundamentally racist and bigoted nation, what else would you expect? No nation that promotes such self-loathing and destructive behavior can possibly expect to survive.

2. **A heavy emphasis on the language in the Declaration of Independence:**
   "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights – that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."
   These words have really never been improved upon and they are the essence of what America stands for – that we are all human beings created in the image of God and therefore we recognize that we have ontological equality regardless of our gender or ethnicity.

   Does this mean that we gloss over the reality of the shameful American apartheid, no, but rather that we emphasize how far we have come towards this ideal.

3. **Resilience and a Positive attitude in the face of Adversity**

   Resiliency training consulting has exploded in corporate America in recent years – mostly because the millennial generation in general has not responded well to adversity in corporate settings. Their educational background and the broader culture has not given them the tools to cope well when dealing with difficult issues.

   While we should absolutely teach the importance of ontological equality and fairness, there is also another reality- that if you want to do anything important in life, there will always be opposition, obstacles and

even people who don't like you but that by hard work and perseverance those things can be overcome. Teaching this will far better prepare our children for responsible adulthood than to teach the CRT doctrine of victimhood and intersectionality which is essentially "competitive victimhood". Finding such a curriculum may not be easy – perhaps we should get creative and develop some of our own for WCS.

I am copying our state representatives, some of whom were at the event and the governor's office on this email because Wit and Wisdom needs to be taken out of the classrooms not only in Williamson County, but also in any other school systems in Tennessee who may be using it.

Most Respectfully,

Gregg Lawrence

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