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From: Kelly Wilkerson
Sent: Thursday, January 7, 2021 12:57 PM
To: DJUSD Board of Education
Cc: Joe DiNunzio; Thomas Adams; Vigdis Asmundson; Lea Darrah; Betsy Hyder
Subject: Public Comment for tonight's board meeting

Categories: Red category

I would like to submit for public comment an email I wrote to my fellow DHS teachers today and would like it read at tonight's board meeting. I would also like to request that the board of education reject the superintendent's email publicly and affirm their support for teachers as they work to convey American and democratic values to their students.

My email to DHS colleagues:

Dear Colleagues,

I was confused and upset about the email we received from Superintendent Bowes yesterday. I sent him a private message asking for clarification but, 24 hours later, have not received a reply, so I want to share my concerns and thoughts with you.

The email included pro forma language last used after the Nov. 3 election telling us to avoid political bias and allow students to express their differing opinions in our virtual classrooms. I thought that email was appropriate. I endeavor to keep my own political views out of the classroom and encourage students to publish a wide variety of views in HUB publications.

But yesterday's email was not about a political issue, it was about an undemocratic assault on the Capitol. It asked us to welcome and support the views of all our students, including those "who strongly celebrate recent election-related actions." It did not condemn yesterday's mob but only said "the civil unrest at our nation's Capitol today causes us to ponder the state of our democracy." The email discouraged teachers from discussing the unprecedented events in Washington, D.C. unless directly related to instruction and admonished us to present it "in a balanced manner..without promoting any particular point of view."

I strongly object to this directive. Elected officials, citizens, and responsible educators of all political views condemn the attempt to interrupt the peaceful transfer of power in our nation's capitol. This is not a political issue; it is an assault on American and democratic norms.

In fact, I would argue that we have a duty to talk about this with our students, who depend on trusted adults to provide context to understand disturbing events. I think of a student in March of 2020 who came up to me and asked, "Mrs. Wilkerson, did schools close during the last pandemic when you were a kid?" I was able to let her know that, no, the COVID-19 shutdown was unprecedented.

This week, we have a responsibility to provide context on an even more important matter. We do not need to talk about this in a "balanced manner" but instead must convey American and democratic values. A violent attack on the nation's Capitol must be condemned today just as the attacks on the Pentagon and the Twin Towers were condemned after 9/11.

I will be discussing this attack with my students and, in journalism class, discussing the important role of journalists in both covering the mob's assault on the capitol while it happened and investigating its causes and police response in the weeks to come.

I believe I will have the support of my union and of my community if the school district attempts to discipline or retaliate against me.

I leave you with one final thought. All public employees in California, including teachers, must sign an oath that reads in part: "I do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will support the Constitution of the United States and the Constitution of the State of California, and that I will faithfully discharge the duties of my office according to the best of my ability; that I do not believe in, and I am not a member of, nor do I support any party or organization that believes in, advocates, or teaches the overthrow of the United States Government, by force or by any illegal or unconstitutional means."

I will be keeping that oath in mind as I meet with students.

With respect for your essential role in educating our students,
Kelly Wilkerson

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