

March 22, 2007

An Open Letter to the Board of Education

Community Unit School District 200
130 West Park Avenue
Wheaton, Illinois 60187

Re: Failure to Follow District Policies – R-Rated Movies in Class

Dear Board Members:

We were disappointed to learn (*Daily Herald*, March 21, 2007) about the District's response to the issue of R-rated movies in classrooms, given that relevant policies are already in place. "Forming a committee" should not be used to diffuse the ultimate responsibility that rests with the Board. We believe that most of the concerns raised by parents, including one who spoke at public comment March 14, exist because of (1) a failure to communicate fully with parents, and (2) failure to follow existing Board policies.

Policy 6.210 permits the use of R-rated movies in high school, but only if prior approval is received from the Department Chair, the Assistant Building Principal, and the Building Principal in accordance with administrative procedures, which shall include the notification of parents. Parents have stated they did not receive full disclosure as to the nature of the films, which would indicate lack of communication and failure to give due notice.

- Did the department chair, assistant principal, and principal each give prior approval to these materials as required by Board policy?
- What advance information about the movies was given to parents?

We have not seen the films at issue, so we won't judge whether they are appropriate. Based on descriptions, however, we understand why some might question whether showing young teens a movie that includes, for example, graphic violence against members of a racial minority, nudity, and 200 uses of four-letter words is the best way to meet the Board's own standards for instructional materials, which, according to your policy (6.220), should:

1. Enrich and support the curriculum;
2. Stimulate growth in knowledge, literary appreciation, aesthetic values, and ethical standards;
3. Provide background information to enable students to make intelligent judgements [sic];
4. Present opposing sides of controversial issues;
5. Be representative of the many religious, ethnic, and cultural groups and their contributions to our American heritage;
6. Depict in an accurate and unbiased way the cultural diversity and pluralistic nature of American society.

Policy 6.220 requires that instructional materials be posted for at least 30 days prior to adoption. Policy 6.210 requires that a list of instructional materials used in the District be revised annually by building administrators under the Superintendent's direction and be made available to the Board as a reference. It has been asserted that films convey instructional messages in a way books can't. If this is the case, films should be given even greater scrutiny before adoption than textbooks, because they can have such a profound effect.

- Were Board policies followed in this case by posting these films for review as instructional materials? Do they appear on a list prepared by Dr. Snyder?
- Did any Board members, or the Superintendent, exercise their individual responsibility to review these materials prior to use in the classroom?

If Board policies were violated, what is needed is not a "committee" but appropriate internal controls to make sure that Board policies are carried out, not ignored. Parents have a right to expect the Board to follow its own policies. If you, as Board members, are unable or unwilling to make sure proper procedures are followed, you are not fulfilling your duty to oversee our schools and provide the best possible education for our children.

Yours truly,

Mark O. Stern
Betty Welker
Paul Yousif

cc: Dr. Gary Catalani
Dr. Charles Baker
Dr. Dawn Snyder
Chicago Tribune
Daily Herald
Warrenville Press
Wheaton Leader
Wheaton Sun

Policy 6.210

Instructional Materials

All District classrooms and learning centers are equipped with a wide assortment of teaching tools, textbooks, audio-visual materials, and equipment selected to meet the students' needs. Textbooks and instructional materials should provide quality learning experiences for students and:

1. Enrich and support the curriculum;
2. Stimulate growth in knowledge, literary appreciation, aesthetic values, and ethical standards;
3. Provide background information to enable students to make intelligent judgements;
4. Present opposing sides of controversial issues;
5. Be representative of the many religious, ethnic, and cultural groups and their contributions to our American heritage;
6. Depict in an accurate and unbiased way the cultural diversity and pluralistic nature of American society.

A list of textbooks and instructional materials used in the District shall be revised annually by building administrators under the Superintendent's direction and shall be made available to the Board and professional staff as a reference. Anyone may inspect any textbook or instructional material.

Teachers are encouraged to limit the use of supplemental media material to only that which will enhance, or otherwise illustrate, the subjects being taught. All supplemental media material must be age-appropriate, and use of full-length commercial films in District classrooms shall be subject to

administrative procedures including general film guidelines.

Additionally, no movie shall be shown to students in grades kindergarten through 8 which is rated PG-13 or R, or to students in grades 9 through 12 which is rated R unless prior approval is received from the Department Chair, the Assistant Building Principal, and the Building Principal in accordance with administrative procedures, which shall include the notification of parents. Movies rated X will not be shown to any students under any circumstances.

Policy 6.220

Instructional Materials Selection and Adoption

Textbooks and instructional materials, both print and non-print, are selected based upon their quality and educational value, and must contribute to a general sense of the worth of all individuals regardless of sex, race, religion, nationality, ethnic origin, disability, or any other differences which may exist.

Textbooks and instructional materials shall be posted for at least 30 days prior to adoption and shall be adopted consistent with provisions of The School Code.

The Superintendent shall recommend to the Board for consideration and adoption all textbooks and instructional materials based upon the recommendations of the Curriculum Councils. The Superintendent's recommendation to the Board shall include the following information:

- recommended texts, including the title, publisher, copyright dates, number of copies desired and cost;
- texts being replaced, publisher and copyright dates;
- rationale for recommendation; and
- selection method.

Community Unit School District 200

Administration and School Service Center
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130 West Park Avenue

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March 23, 2007

Mr. Mark O. Stern
Mrs. Betty Welker
Mr. Paul Yousif

Below, we have responded to your email titled "Failure to Follow District Policy – R Rated Movies in Class":

Paragraph #1

As a Board of Education, we have responded to the "R" rated issue through governance. We announced at our February 14, 2007 Board of Education meeting that we were going to discuss the appropriateness of Policy 6.210. At the request of staff, this discussion has been delayed and a committee has been assembled to study the relevant issues and report back to the Board of Education with their recommendations. After hearing from the committee and from the community at large, the Board will take appropriate action through policy governance.

As explained at our most recent Board of Education meeting, all parents were notified of the intended use of the "R" rated movies as per Board Policy. Most importantly, the policy worked as intended to bring forward parental concerns. As you are aware, the Board has a strong tradition of involving stakeholders in decision making on issues that involve respect for diverse family values. The committee that has been developed to research this issue will assist the Board in obtaining valuable input from the collective school community, something we are sure you agree with. As a Board, we have been criticized for making decisions without community input, and now are being criticized for not making a top-down decision void of stakeholder involvement.

Paragraph # 2

As stated above, the provisions of policy 6.210 were adhered to, including the use of a parent permission form notifying parents of the intent to use "R" rated films. A copy of the permission form is attached and clearly indicates the films to be used, reasons for the "R" rating, and the fact that the teacher will edit the films as they deem appropriate.

Paragraph #3

We agree that "some might question whether showing" these movies is the "best way to meet" our standards of instruction. That is the very purpose of the committee.

The committee is charged with answering the question: Are the current rules and procedures as listed in Policy 6.210 still appropriate? It should be noted that this policy was first approved in 1993 and has since been modified by this and prior Boards.

In addition, the committee will be asked to identify procedures that can be utilized to ensure that films selected for use by individual teachers meet all of our instructional standards.

Paragraph #4

Policy 6.220 addresses the adoption of instructional materials that are required to be used by all teachers to deliver the critical content. These materials are identified through our ongoing curriculum work and are posted to obtain public feedback, prior to a vote by the Board. In all classrooms, teachers supplement the adopted materials with resources they believe will assist them in delivering the curriculum. When this involves the use of films, Policy 6.210 governs this creative license. For example, in our Family Living Unit, we have identified films to be used and have adopted them as per the procedures listed in Policy 6.220. The films in question are teacher selected supplemental materials, and are not governed by Policy 6.220 and were not posted for review. Please be assured that the Board of Education and Superintendent review all posted materials prior to their adoption. It should be pointed out that during teacher induction sessions, teachers are cautioned about the use of teacher selected supplemental materials and are aware of their responsibility in utilizing materials that have not been provided by the school district. Certainly, the committee will determine whether or not Policy 6.210 and 6.220 should be merged so as to better address this issue.

This Board has and will continue to govern this school district with appropriate care and concern for all students. Our policies have not been ignored; in fact, we referenced our policies when this issue was brought to our attention and we have directed staff and community members to come together as a committee to help determine if our policies need to be modified.

Sincerely

Andrew Johnson
Rosemary Swanson
Barbara Intihar
John Bomher
Joann Coghill
Ken Knicker
Marie Slater

Board of Education, Community Unit School District 200

CC: Dr. Gary T. Catalani
Dr. Charles Baker
Dr. Dawn Snyder
Chicago Tribune
Daily Herald
Warrenville Press
Wheaton Leader
Wheaton Sun

January 17, 2007

Dear Parents/Guardians,

I would like to welcome you and your son/daughter to Sociology. This letter is intended to provide an overview of some of the course and expectations that will relate to our class throughout the semester.

What is Sociology?

The study of human society and social behavior; the study of how groups influence people and how people influence groups.

Current Events

Each student is going to be responsible to trace a sociological topic in the news, throughout the semester. The students will choose a sociological topic in which they are interested to follow. They will be asked to bring in a total of five news articles with an attached written summary and reflection on each article. Each assignment will be worth ten points.

Daily Homework

Do not be surprised if you do not see a Sociology book at home. We keep the books in the classroom to use as references. Homework assignments will be given throughout the semester, in addition to projects.

Course Units

- I. Introduction to Sociology
- II. Groups and Group Behavior
- III. Culture
- IV. Crime and Deviance
- V. Prejudice and Discrimination

Students will get detailed assignments and rubrics for the various projects throughout the semester.

Films/Video Clips

As part of our sociology curriculum, I would like to show the following films/clips throughout the semester. I believe that each of these films provides valuable educational lessons relating to our curriculum. However, these films are rated "R" due to language, violence, and sexual content. I will delete individual scenes as I see necessary. If you have any questions or concerns, please call me or email me.

Crime and Deviance: *Scared Straight* (a documentary illustrating prison life)

Race: *Crash, American History X*

Again, welcome to Sociology. Please sign the bottom of this page showing that you've read this and you give me permission to show the films/clips. Your son/daughter should return it to me by **Friday, Jan. 19th**. Thank you. Please feel free to contact me at any time.

Sincerely,

Sociology

Please sign below showing you have read this. Also, please provide me with the most efficient contact information. Thank you.

Student Name _____ Hr _____

Parent Name _____

Parent Signature _____ Date _____

Home phone #: _____

Work phone #: _____

Email: _____