

On Thu, Apr 22, 2021 at 9:27 AM FALLERT, NATALI <fallertnatalie@rsdmo.org> wrote:

Hello,

I am sending this out to all 6-1, head principals and ELA principals if they are not the head. Originally, I was going to send two separate messages, but let's face it, our parents are talking across buildings and grade levels, so knowing what these parents are honing in on can be helpful. Also, the message from them is very clear and focused on the same issues. Sorry for the length!!!

I know that I have received a few emails and calls of worry from teachers. My apologies if my email last week was ambiguous and left you worried or wondering if you had done something wrong. Let me clarify a few things.

- 1) IF there was a complaint most likely it came to you first and then came to me or after it came to me I reached out to you. So you would/should know.
- 2) In the wake of last week's email, I have had a few who have reached out and told me things parents complained about that were resolved between parent and teacher, so I was not aware. However, with these, I am finding crossover, so I want to bring that to your attention.
- 3) I want to sincerely apologize for "assuming" something. I received a complaint about the 9<sup>th</sup> intersectionality lesson back in January/early Feb. The issue was handled through Dr. Willott and didn't hear anything more about it. Then in mid-March I got a similar complaint. I was able to resolve the issue and move on. I did two things 1) assumed these were isolated events 2) my brain was still in the mode of everyone teaching the units at the same time (but I remember that we changed that going into 2<sup>nd</sup> semester) soi though we were "done" with this unit/module. I did make notes for future reference on the lesson, but I didn't broadcast that to you guys. I am truly sorry!

Here are issues that have been brought to my attention:

8<sup>th</sup> – Critical Literacy Unit

- Pretty much anything in Bend 2, which deals with Power Imbalances (gender norms, stereotypes, identity, relationships of authority, etc). The anchor text in this is video clips from *The Hate U Give*.

9<sup>th</sup> – Culture and Identity Unit

- Cultural Intersections – Lesson – Video, Article, etc.

9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> – Use of the book *Dear Martin* by Nic Stone. They are complaining about the use of the "F" word in the text. There are also claims that this book was specifically selected to help district individuals in a side business creating a conflict of interest. WE KNOW THIS IS FALSE! For a ton of reasons, but the biggest is that I, NATALIE, bought the book, and we have a total of 250 books by this author (not even this title) 6-12.

Recurring Messages that appear in the emails:

- We are pushing an agenda
- We are teaching Critical Race Theory (I had to look this one up! There are a ton of definitions, so to know which they are honing in on specifically can be tough)
- We are making white kids feel bad about their privilege
- We are specifically talking about and using the word “White privilege”
- We are teaching kids to be social activists (and should be teaching cursive – I had to throw this one in for good measure, I thought all my 6-12 teachers would appreciate this additional expectation in your daily teachings)
- We are teaching microaggressions from whites (only) to blacks (only) and stereotyping
- We are teaching kids to be democratic thinkers and activists

What I am finding...

- When the word “privilege” is used in any way in a classroom or appears on a Canvas page that is visible to a parent, they automatically attach the word WHITE to it. **Right now, DON’T use the word privilege.**
- They believe that democratic is equal to Democrats. They do not understand that democratic means to be a part of a democracy. **Right now, use the word CRITICAL THINKERS.**
- They believe that the word activists means to go out and sit in cops faces and protest by setting cars on fire (yes, this is a bit of a leap, or maybe it isn’t). **Right now, use the words “take a position.”**
- Most of these lessons are being taught across the district and MULTIPLE classrooms and are a huge success! Kids are learning, talking about books, and overall things are good. I even went into classrooms where these specific lessons were being taught to see for myself.

What I believe...

- None or very few kids are going home and complaining about “feeling bad” or “depressed”
- Parents are seeing these resources on Canvas and LOOKING for specific things to then complain about. These items are read out of context and they are assuming the worst.
- It is a cell of parents who have “tried” to get district attention and didn’t like our response, so now they are coming after individual teachers. (I am REALLY sorry for this – I don’t know how to stop it!)

What I have done...

- This weekend I did go through what I thought were the remaining units that most will be going through to see if there is anything that a parent might complain about. I sent emails to those who would be teaching those lessons and offered changes/suggestions. I went through Social Issues (7<sup>th</sup>), Critical Literacy (8<sup>th</sup>), 9<sup>th</sup> Argument, 9<sup>th</sup> My voice in the World, 10<sup>th</sup> MisCx and 10<sup>th</sup> Capstone.

- Realize I am only one set of eyes and that was a lot to cover in one weekend. Now that you have a better understanding of what parents are honing in on you can also be a second set of eyes. You know your kids and parents est in your classroom/building, so make adjustments as you go. This doesn't mean throw out the lesson and find a new one. Just pull the resource off Canvas so parents cannot see it.
- Here is a document with some of the responses I have sent to parents. This may give you a better idea of how I am communicating our goals and intentions etc.
- We are moving the 6-8 Curriculum approval to the BOE to June instead of May.
- I have met with the communication department (Mary Lapak and David Morrison). We are working on two videos. One that will go out with my 6-8 curriculum that focusses on students and what they are learning through these new units. One that is more procedural that will explain the process of how books are reviewed and approved for ELA classes. I see the first video as ONLY for 6-8, it will just go out with that message. It will be more about 6-12 ELA goals and purposes as a whole with a focus on student outcomes. Ideally that we want to make kids better readers, writers, thinkers, and collaborators than showing this with student footage of some of the things that they are doing.

What you can do...

- Preview lessons before you publish them with all of the above in mind.
- Keep teaching! Just don't make everything visible on Canvas. This is not being deceitful. This is just doing what you have been doing for years. Prior to the pandemic you didn't send everything home or have it available. You taught in your classroom and things were peachy keen. We are going old-school.
- You could Duplicate an entry/lesson in Canvas (making 2 copies) Publish ONE for the whole class that is a LEAN version of the lesson. The "original" that has all the stuff on it, can be published and only assigned to specific students (IF NEEDED). OR you could specifically email those students a copy of what they need.
- If you are in the 9<sup>th</sup> Cultural Identity unit – tread lightly! I would say that this one is probably getting the same responses as the Critical Literacy. Any topic that would deal with stereotypes, identity, intersectionality, culture, race, suggestions I sent to teachers yesterday for this unit).
- If YOU come across something that I have not referenced that you feel might raise an eyebrow PLEASE share it with me!

Last thing...I am heading out today at 3:00 to celebrate my 20<sup>th</sup> with my husband in Nashville. I will respond to emails until about noon tomorrow and then I will be signing off until Sunday night. I don't mean to be leaving you high and dry, ut our anniversary and Nashville plans were kind of in the works before the ELA world blew up.

I cannot even begin to explain how grateful I am for all of you and your perseverance and resiliency. I hate that we are even having to have this conversation, 29 days and counting!

## 9<sup>th</sup> – Cultural Identity

I would say DO NOT create new and individual lessons for these children. Remind parents (or if you need me to remind them....) the essential questions of the unit and the intro to the unit. So the lessons were created to help understand how cultural identity influences a piece of work. We are also teaching to the MLS – RI/RL.3.C Analyze how multiple texts reflect the historical and/or cultural contexts. (If they say let's do historical – say, we cover that in other units this one is on culture!) RI/RL.3.A Analyze how similar ideas or topics are portrayed in different media formats. RL.2.D. Analyze how complex characters develop.... RL.2.B. Analyze how POV is reflected in the characters, setting and plot. RL.1.D – Developing themes.

### CHANGES YOU COULD MAKE:

For instance, when you go to Author's Point of view....

Maybe...make a copy of this entry. On one delete the Apply Section, and under READ just put "Read the story in the Foundations of Language and Literature Text on pages 827-829 and be ready to discuss these questions (list the questions that are there, remove the PDF and the "title" of the piece". Under Respond. Take out the title and just say Adams's essay he uses writing..."

The reason I say "make a copy" You can publish the NEW one that has less information on it. Then for that kid who is all virtual and needs the full lesson, you can publish it and assign it to ONLY that kid. OR you could email that kid the attachments they need.

Anything that "could" be picked apart I would suggest using this above approach. When I go through the upcoming lessons for this module – the only recent one that may cause an issue is the "By Any Other Name". Again I wouldn't throw it out, ut you could just not give them access to the story. The anchor texts after that are pretty innocent. When you get to Power Imbalances – You might remove the two examples and just go over them in class (same as above)

I need to think on the time write #1...."I" do not think this is bad and lets kids explore any topic...but having another set of eyes on it to pick it apart might uncover a possible objection.

Assumptions about Groups – Pull the anchor texts off of Canvas.

Prep for Timed Write #2 – Under 1, it says poverty, racism, homophobia, domestic abuse" maybe take this out or change to poverty, abuse, class, etc.

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