

May 4, 2015

Dear Members of the Board of Education,

I write to you concerning a recent Facebook post by board member Julie Williams, in which she appears to not only condone but promote the degradation of LGBTQ students in our schools. This directly conflicts with National PTA's values of collaboration, commitment, accountability, respect, inclusivity, and integrity. PTA embraces the uniqueness of all individuals, appreciating that each contributes a diversity of views, cultural heritage/traditions, skills/abilities, values and preferences. You can find PTA's diversity and inclusivity policies here <http://copta.org/diversity-inclusivity/>. Since the mission of PTA is to make every child's potential a reality by empowering families and communities to advocate for **ALL** children, Jeffco PTA must take a stand to bring a troubling pattern to your attention in order to stop it from harming students and staff in our schools.

Ms. Williams' Facebook post, which originally came from SaveCalifornia.com, an organization the Southern Policy Law Center classified as a hate group, is only the most recent episode in a series of actions on the part of our board majority that show disrespect for the diversity of our student population in Jefferson County:

- At a candidate forum in the fall of 2013, John Newkirk said, in response to a question about diversity, "As an American, I am personally offended by diversity." Also as a candidate, Mr. Witt refused to acknowledge diversity at all.
- During the 2014 superintendent search, when our community made very clear via a survey and public forums that they wanted a candidate with the skills to reach out to a growing ethnic and culturally diverse community, the board majority voted against including this as part of the search criteria and, in fact, Mr. Witt said, "I don't like the word '*diversity*.'"
- Only a short time later, the board majority voted against \$600,000 to expand free full day Kindergarten to schools with high populations of At-Risk children, a majority of whom happen to be ethnic minorities. The board majority voted against this a second time before the 2014-2015 school year's budget was finalized. During this same period, the board majority voted to give hundreds of thousands of dollars in loans to failing charter schools with high populations of middle to high income white students.
- In September of 2014, when Ms. Williams put forth a proposal to create a committee to review the AP History framework, Williams stated she opposed the current framework's emphasis on race, gender, class, and ethnicity. One of her supporters said on local television, "They're pointing out the bad about America. They're pointing out

slavery, they're pointing out everything the white man has done in bad about America." You can still find that story and quote here <http://kdvr.com/2014/10/02/several-hundred-show-up-for-intense-debate-about-curriculum-review-at-jeffco-school-board-meeting/>.

- In early November of 2014, the board majority and our superintendent attended an event openly billed and marketed as being co-sponsored by the American Freedom Party, a known white supremacist organization. At this event, our board majority was presented with a cake that said, "We support Ken, Julie, and John." I am aware that claims were later made that the American Freedom Party was listed in error but I'm certain you can see why Jeffco parents and taxpayers are concerned.

I recognize that Ms. Williams has apologized for her Facebook post, however, in the form letter being sent to parents and community members who have written to express their upset, Ms. Williams states that she has apologized, that she made a simple mistake, and then goes on to scold letter writers from the very community she is serving with claims they have taken things too far by associating Williams with the hate espoused in her Facebook re-post.

A screenshot of Ms. Williams re-post shows some of the responses from her supporters. One says, "...how about walk out and stay out, then we can really start talking," and another posts a link to an article titled "10 Reasons Christians Should Boycott the Day of Silence." Even if Ms. Williams' post was a mistake, it started a continued stream of vitriol directed at our students that cannot be stemmed by apologies or removal of the post in question.

In addition to the hurt caused to students, these words have had a chilling effect on our gay and lesbian teachers and employees. District employees already cite a negative climate and hostile work environment due to the board majority's lack of collaboration and respect. Now our gay and lesbian teachers have yet another reason to feel marginalized and disrespected. We cannot expect to recruit and retain the highest quality teachers and staff to Jeffco Schools if our reputation is one of discrimination of and disrespect for employees.

As the post shared by Ms. Williams says bullying of gay and lesbian students is greatly exaggerated, I'd like to point out a few facts about gay and lesbian youth suicide (www.speakforthem.org/facts.html).

- Suicide is the leading cause of death among gay and lesbian youth nationally
- 30% of gay youth attempt suicide near the age of 15
- Gays and lesbians are 2 to 6 times more likely to attempt suicide than heterosexuals

- Almost half of gay and lesbian teens state they have attempted suicide more than once.
- It has been **conservatively** estimated that 1,500 Gay and Lesbian youth commit suicide every year

As an elected official, a leader of one of Colorado's and one of the nation's largest school districts, it is incumbent upon Ms. Williams to own up to what she has done and the hurt she has caused **without** laying blame on others, and to work to make amends to our children and our community.

If this were the first time we had seen this sort of careless thought and behavior from Ms. Williams, this community might be more forgiving, but it is not. In light of this, Jeffco PTA's Board of Directors requests the topic of a formal censure of Julie Williams be added to the May 7 meeting agenda. With a vote to censure Ms. Williams, this school board can send Jefferson County a strong message. The message must be that you stand with **EVERY** student, regardless of race, religion, socio-economic status, and sexual orientation and against intolerance of any kind.

An apology is not enough. Action must be taken. Perhaps Ms. Williams might consider attending some meetings of our Gay Straight Alliance groups in our high schools and get to know these children. They are living, breathing, thinking, feeling, human beings and they deserve supportive and understanding adult role models who demonstrate the inclusive, positive behavior we want them to exhibit

Sincerely,

Michele Patterson
President, Jefferson County Council PTA
On Behalf of the Jefferson County Council PTA Board of Directors

Julie Williams form letter. This same letter was sent to several parents who wrote with concerns about Williams' FB post:

Thank you for your concern about bullying in our schools. As a mom of a special needs child, I share your concerns. Last week, I posted a link that addressed concerns some members of the community expressed to me over an event called Day of Silence. As you know, I am always committed to ensuring that parents have complete access, information and choice related to their children's education and I often post items related to those themes. My interest was in ensuring parents have background knowledge on events and activities in our schools. I wasn't familiar with the organization that I linked to, and recognize now that this organization's language and/or mission may be hurtful to some in our community. I am sincerely sorry for any hurt this may have caused as it was not my intention.

Once I was made aware of the situation, I removed the link from my Facebook page and apologized. I do want to address your implication that I actually wrote these words. I understand that political attacks are part of serving on the Jefferson County School Board, and have grown accustomed to them, but your blatant mischaracterization goes too far. The words that you claim are "hateful speech... coming from a board member" did not come from me. That statement is a quote from a website, those are not my words. I have apologized for posting that website's statement on my Facebook page but your accusation those words were mine is absolutely false.

This was an unfortunate mistake. I am hopeful those I have hurt will forgive my mistake, and that we can continue working together to deliver an excellent education for Jeffco Schools' students.

Regards,
Julie Williams
Jefferson County Board of Education