

(This letter is intended for the parents of children currently at Sewickley Academy as well as Alumni. If you are neither of these, then we ask that you kindly disregard this letter.)

June 1, 2021

Dear SA Families,

We are writing to you as concerned parents that have children attending Sewickley Academy. As you know, the Academy recently released its Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Social Justice Plan, which intends to "[m]ap curriculum and pedagogy, Pre-K through Grade 12, to the [Southern Poverty Law Center] Learning for Justice Standards." Per the Southern Poverty Law Center, these standards demand "radical" change to educational programming and, in our view, very much rewrite the focus, mission, and experience of the Academy. Recently, the Administration offered a short "Q&A" as to its new plan; we think it's time for an open, inclusive, fulsome, and intellectually honest discussion about the scope of the plan and its effect on our children.

By way of a very brief background, "Learning for Justice" is a rebranding of the Teaching for Tolerance program. As explained in the SPLJ's February 2021 press release, **"Learning for Justice is the new name for our work in the struggle for radical change in the education and community...the voices in this issue demand radical change, challenging white supremacy in school and teacher education curricula, school discipline policies, school facilities, and classroom climates."** The remainder of this release can be found at the sewickleyparents.org website. We know very few within the Academy Community who are looking for "radical change" on campus, and flatly reject any notion that a continued focus on academic excellence - as opposed to subjective "social justice" concepts – is reflective of white supremacy.

Candidly, the recently released "Q&A" raises some troubling questions. For instance, we've heard that "The Social Justice Standards developed by Learning for Justice are widely acknowledged to support the educational outcomes that we want for our students." If you haven't already, we encourage you to learn more about Learning for Justice through its website – learningforjustice.org – such that you can make your own decision as to whether the call to radical change is one that you support for your children. Similarly, the latest Q&A suggests "[w]e have no courses in CRT, and existing courses are not based on it." Click on the link shared by the Administration, and you'll see that CRT "cannot be confined to a static and narrow definition but is considered to be an evolving and malleable practice." Like you, we're looking for real talk and straight answers about the changes.

We all chose to send our children to the Academy and are committed to its continued success. However, we have experienced situations that contrast deeply with our prior experience at Sewickley Academy over the last school year. We are troubled by stories that our children tell us of the politicization of the classroom and environment at Sewickley. The primary focus of Sewickley Academy has been and should remain on the teaching of the academic fundamentals of reading, writing, mathematics, science, history, and the arts; **social or political overtones should not burden these subjects.**

As a community, we all support diversity in education – diversity of race, gender, socioeconomic status, background, thought, etc. We celebrate our children's ability to be their authentic selves at Sewickley Academy. **We also deeply respect that there are many differing views on these very personal topics.**

We believe that individual families should determine what guidance they wish to provide to their children on these sensitive and subjective matters, not Sewickley Academy.

In February of this year, we expressed our concerns to the Board over politicization and social programming becoming a central focus of the curriculum and campus environment at Sewickley Academy. Their response indicated that the Administration had addressed these concerns and recommended that we await the release of the new DEISJ plan. Unfortunately, instead of the DEISJ plan addressing our concerns, it has only deepened them. The "Plan," in our view, appears to relegate academic excellence to a position secondary to amorphous "social justice standards" and further facilitates politicized, ideological education.

We believe the current direction taken by the Administration needs to be reevaluated, with the alignment to the highly political Southern Poverty Law Center abandoned. Most Academy families we are familiar with chose the Academy for good, sound reasons – including its demonstrated track record for diversity – and are not looking for "radical" change. We can't imagine that the Board had that in mind, either, when it approved the DEISJ Plan presented by the Administration.

We all want to see the Academy flourish for decades to come and celebrate the students and alumni's academic and professional achievements, many of which are made possible by attending Sewickley Academy. We don't want this long-standing commitment to students to be replaced by political activism and projected ideology. In good conscience, we cannot continue our active, fully engaged support of the Academy where current leadership seeks to repurpose the Academy for a different mission. **Regardless of your personal political or ideological persuasion, if you support leaving politics and activism out of education, then we ask that you lend your voice to our collective efforts.**

We are again reaching out to the Board to solicit their assistance in addressing this situation and are asking them to work with Administration and the community at large to ensure Sewickley Academy:

- Remains primarily focused on the academic fundamentals of reading, writing, mathematics, science, history, and the arts, unencumbered with social or political doctrine;
- Eliminates the adoption of any form of critical race theory, implied or otherwise;
- Disassociates itself with radical political ideology, including that promoted by the Southern Poverty Law Center;
- Provides an environment that allows students to freely be their authentic selves and express their views without fear of retribution from faculty and students;
- Encourages and recruits students with the highest potential regardless of their economic situation, race, color, or creed;
- Hires and retains faculty and administrators based on proven track records of professional and academic excellence regardless of race, color, or creed;
- Ensures parents are engaged in the selection and adoption of the curriculum;
- Designates a dedicated resource that students and parents alike can anonymously access to report the restriction of free expression or thought;
- Establishes a formal mechanism that ensures parents have a voice in the selection of Board members.

We are committed to using our voices, time, and financial contributions to encourage the Sewickley Academy leadership and Board to chart a different course than the one currently being taken by the Administration at Sewickley Academy.

We have created a website so we can better organize our efforts and share information. Please take a moment to visit www.sewickleyparents.org. Working together, we will directly contribute to the preservation of Sewickley Academy and support its history of instilling academic excellence in children and positioning them for a lifetime of achievement.

We appreciate your time and consideration. Should you have questions, feel free to send us an email at info@sewickleyparents.org.

Respectfully yours,

Your Friends and Neighbors Sharing Your Interest in Sewickley Academy