

OPINION: DCSD Firing is a Sign of Dangerous Partisanship in School Curriculum

By Jacob Gold '23

“Oh, can I go home?” whined Douglas County School Board member Becky Myers during a vote to remove now-former superintendent Corey Wise from the district in early February.

After a three-hour emergency meeting in which public comment—normally allowed in any board meeting—was not permitted, four members voted to fire Wise without any official reason. Amid sorry excuses from board members claiming they had “trust issues” and that they didn’t have faith in Wise to be a “leader,” it was clear that the firing wasn’t about the students; it was about something far more malevolent.

The controversy has garnered regional, state, and even national attention from both critics and supporters. However, the board’s malfeasance started before the Wise firing was even mentioned – at least publicly.

Denver 7 reported that four conservative board members met outside of the board room and away from public view just a few days before the firing occurred. Wise was sent an email urging him to resign from his job or wait to be voted out by the secret majority. If the accusations of these secret meetings were true, it would mean that the members had violated Colorado open meeting statutes.

The reason for the threats wasn’t immediately clear – Wise was very popular among students and teachers alike. One student even said he was “in shock... because there was really no reason to fire him,” according to Rocky Mountain PBS.

Some student protesters, according to RMPBS, said that the decision may have had something to do with the board’s controversy surrounding their equity policy. The policy, in part, reads that the district will not condone “biased, inequitable, racist, or exclusive practices.” In mid-January, the board voted to change the policy due to parent concerns that the district would be teaching “critical race theory” to its students.

In the last few months, critical race theory has become a far-right buzzword in limiting schools from teaching about racism, segregation, and even the holocaust. School boards and state legislatures alike have made bold moves in limiting school curriculum. Texas’ House Bill 3979 made strides in the state legislature to limit the way schools can talk about race in America. Florida’s House Bill 248 did the same. Even more recently, a Tennessee school district banned *Maus*, a book meant to teach readers about the atrocities of Germany in World War II. It would appear, based on the board’s recent actions, that they plan to extend the use of the phrase to eliminate policies preventing racism in the classroom.

The board’s decision to change policies about equity and to fire anyone who gets in their way falls in line with recent handling of national issues of race in America. But perhaps the most

ironic thing about all of this is that all four board members conspiring to bring these changes to Douglas County campaigned under the guise of non-partisanship.

As it turns out, all four campaigned under the slogan “Kids First” in their recent elections to the board. Their website’s “About” page even tells constituents that “It is time to put Douglas County kids first and get politics out of our schools.”

There is nothing about firing an empathetic, passionate superintendent like Corey Wise that puts kids first. Changing equity policies to appeal more to parents who would rather pretend that racism doesn’t exist isn’t putting kids first. Ignoring the voices of students, parents, and teachers in favor of advancing a political agenda isn’t putting kids first.

More recently, a Douglas County judge ruled that ‘Kids First’ board members had violated open meeting law in their secret discussions to oust Wise, according to an article by 9 News. While it does condemn the corruption that occurred and demands that further meetings take place in clear view of constituents, it carries no disciplinary weight to correct the members’ actions. Despite being an apparent step in the right direction, it leaves the county in peril at the hands of politicians who have already chosen to simply disregard the law.

There’s no more room in this country to tolerate lies, corruption, and censorship. As a district, as a state, and as a country, it is our responsibility to stand up for the truth at all levels of society.

Of course, con artists like “Kids First” board members need to be held accountable, but this isn’t enough on its own. We must take steps to ensure that our education system isn’t precluded by disinformation and lies. Using our votes to keep malicious politicians’ hands off curriculum is only the start. There’s a need for meaningful change in how we establish instructional standards in this country.