



Follow on Questions

Sun, Aug 8, 2021 at 2:44 PM

[Redacted]
To: "Sherman, Michele" <msherman@ccboe.net>
Cc: kelly.tyson@ccboe.net, marcus.allen@ccboe.net
[Redacted]

Ms. Sherman,

Thank you so much for the response! I can assure you that we are all on the same team trying to keep our children safe. Unfortunately, we seem to have different approaches that are potentially conflicting with one another. I appreciate your reassurances that nothing inappropriate is taught at school, but in light of the nature of the SEL program as highlighted in my questions, what you and I deem to be "inappropriate" is probably not aligned. The nature of my questions was to help me understand the basis of the school's method of deeming things "appropriate," with the goal of reassuring me that we are, in fact, on the same page. Judging by the reading materials I have seen in school libraries, along with my children reporting teachers giving inappropriate opinions on sexually sensitive topics during class time, I can only conclude that we are not on the same page. As an associate superintendent, I can't imagine a better use of your time than to address a concerned parent's questions on a matter so important as what is considered right and wrong in our schools, especially since SEL is a program that clearly advocates for children to be involved in identifying and correcting the wrongs in society around them. If no one can (or will) answer my questions on how right and wrong are decided at school, how am I to have faith in the SEL program? This program has received attention nationally because it has been used to serve as an opening to bring CRT, LGBT, transgender, and sexual content into everyday teaching at all ages, without parental knowledge or consent. As a parent knowing this and seeing this trend, do I not have a responsibility to ask questions? Am I expected to look away and assume that these things wouldn't happen in our schools? As an educator, wouldn't you want to answer them for me honestly and thoroughly to put my mind at ease? I would much rather be convinced with facts and answered questions than merely reassured with emotional arguments for why it is a necessary program.

If you could please reconsider answering my questions, I would very much appreciate it! If there is a better POC for this matter, then please direct me to them as well. I am also more than happy to set up a meeting time in person if that would be best. Thanks so much!

Sincerely,

On Wed, Aug 4, 2021 at 8:55 AM Sherman, Michele <msherman@ccboe.net> wrote:

Good morning, [REDACTED]

I hope you are doing well. I am writing to you on behalf of Mrs. Tyson and Mr. Allen, her supervisor. To answer all your questions below would take an inordinate amount of time and we are focused on providing a rich, inspiring education for our students at this time. I would like to reassure you that we do not teach critical race theory, nor are there any plans to do so.

We work very hard to keep our teachers focused on the state standards that can be located at georgiastandards.org. Further, the move to add counselors and curriculum related to mental health is in direct response to the rise in suicidal ideation in our student population. I'm not sure if you are aware, but we have lost a student, sometimes two, to suicide every year for the past several years.

Because we are a public school district, our content, methodology, and more come under great scrutiny, as it should. I want you to know that we do not take our role lightly and carefully monitor the curriculum that our students have access to in our schools. Each year, with the help of technology, we are able to offer a more secure learning environment that is keenly focused on our state standards.

If you have further concerns, please feel free to contact me directly. Thank you and we look forward to serving your children and you TOMORROW! 😊



Michele Sherman

Associate Superintendent

Phone: (706)-541-2723 x5235

----- Forwarded message -----

From: [REDACTED]

Date: Sun, Jul 25, 2021, 1:37 PM

Subject: Follow on Questions

To: <kelly.tyson@ccboe.net>

Ms. Tyson,

Thank you so much for taking the time to respond so thoroughly, I appreciate it. It seems like everyone has the best intentions, and that is great as well. I took some time to do my research on my own since your email so that I could learn more about this program. I did have some follow on questions if you don't mind:

1) Student Privacy -

- This is an article I found to be very interesting. [Bill Gates, CASEL and your student's privacy – Seattle Education \(seattleducation.com\)](#)
- What are your thoughts on the items presented in the article?
- Are students being asked to complete surveys, etc for these courses?
- Are students having any record, paper or electronic, associated with participation in this course?
- Is data of any sort being collected regarding this course?
- If so, who has access to that data? Are third parties involved? Will parents be informed of this prior to the course?

- Who funds the SEL curriculum? Please give a comprehensive list.
- Does the county, or any schools in the county, receive any sort of benefit in exchange for teaching this course, be it financial, material, discounts, vouchers, or other?
- It would seem terribly invasive if someone were to keep track of my psychological ups and downs every year of my life and keep it in a file... is this what we are doing to our children through this program?

2) The social focus of the program -

- While many aspects of the program seem great (kindness, gratitude, etc), there are also many references to teaching children social "norms". Who decides what is "normal"?
- What "social norms" will be taught in Columbia County's SEL program? As we are in the Bible Belt with a large Christian population, will this be the "social norm" that children are measured against? If not, which "social norms" will be used, and why?

3) The connection between MindUP, Mindfulness, and Buddhism -

- The CASEL program mentioned these a lot in my research. As a nation founded on Judeo-Christian principles, why are we replicating societal/foundational beliefs from China, our nation's most serious adversary? [National Defense Strategy](#)
- As a nation founded on Judeo-Christian principles, with Christianity as the dominant religion, why is there no mention of right and wrong as determined by a higher power?
- Without the recognition of a higher power and Judeo-Christian beliefs, the backbone of our nation's ethical system disappears. What is the new basis for determining right and wrong in schools? Is it the decision of the teacher? County? Program author? Parents? Government officials?
- Right and wrong clearly vary from culture to culture around the world, and have traditionally been based upon the culture's dominant religion. Coincidentally, nations like China and North Korea are known for being actively against all deity-based religions, as they fear it will endanger the power of the central government. Is experimenting with Buddhist-linked principles in place of traditional religious-linked ones a wise move? (For the record, I am not advocating that a particular religion be taught in schools, merely pointing out that moving away from the idea of a higher power being the focal point for determining right and wrong is a major shift from American values dating back to the Constitution).

4) The county, and other schools around the nation, state that they are turning to SEL to build successful children and stronger communities. Theoretically then, wouldn't it be better to return to teaching religion in school? Data clearly supports that it achieves these goals as well, without the risks associated with a new and untested program being launched upon children. If anything, the second link would suggest that borrowing from Buddhist principles specifically would be a hindrance in achieving these objectives.

[Are religious people happier, healthier? | Pew Research Center](#)

[How income varies among U.S. religious groups | Pew Research Center](#)

5) What if parents don't agree with what SEL teaches is right and wrong?

- For example, students are taught to stand up for systemic injustices to fix their communities-does this mean our students will be encouraged to be pro-life? Pro-choice? Pro illegal immigration? Against?

- It is one thing to debate these items in a civics class; it's quite another to teach definitively what is right and wrong on controversial social issues

- Are we not seeing this very principle of SEL becoming a divisive issue through the manifestation of Critical Race Theory being taught in schools across the US? Children are being taught empirically what is "right" and it is not in line with what many parents and families believe.

- What happens when children are taught what is "right" with social issues and realize that it differs from what is taught at home? Won't this cause confusion and potentially place a wedge between parents and their children?

- What was wrong with the original system of teaching the Golden Rule of treating others how you want to be treated? Wouldn't it save a lot of money to go back to something tried and true, simple, non-denominational, and not requiring time away from actual academics?

6) Stressing the "best self" concept

- This is another item that seems great at face value, but looking deeper into it has given me concerns, especially with how it has manifested in schools around the nation

- My research has shown a strong correlation between this SEL concept and encouraging transgender ideology/homosexuality in children. If a child discusses the idea of being transgender/homosexual, does the school encourage this in an effort to pursue their idea of the child's "best self?" Are parents notified? There have been multiple cases around the country where schools have not informed parents of this very same situation, so it is a legitimate cause for concern.

- If transgender ideology/homosexuality is encouraged from this, what considerations are given to Christian/Jewish/Muslim children who are taught that this is immoral?

7) If the county program has no intention of teaching Critical Race Theory, then why was it being promoted on the website? Also, why can I no longer find the SEL section on the CCBOE website?

8) I see multiple references to "global citizenship" (including in the county mission statement), but where are the references to patriotism for one's country?

9) If SEL is incorporated into every aspect of learning vs. separate lessons (as is being recommended), how will I be able to opt my child out of the program?

10) Will each school be posting its individual SEL curriculum in full, in accordance with GA Code 20-2-1017(d)?

I know this is a lot, and please take a few days as needed to respond by email. Unfortunately, I am very difficult to reach by phone during business hours while at work, so email is the best way to communicate. I truly believe that this program has some great points taught by great teachers, and probably even has some positive impacts, but I ultimately believe that the risks make for an unfavorable balance of the cost-benefit analysis. I absolutely do not think our schools should gravitate to this program simply because it is the latest fad in education, especially with how we are seeing it be used to create divisive situations between children, parents, and educators.

Thank you again, so much, for your time and consideration answering my questions.

Sincerely,