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UNDETERRED & UNMANAGED

Inside the obsession with 'White Privilege'
that is roiling Edina's public schools.

By Katherine Kersten

The Fall 2017 issue of *Thinking Minnesota* featured an article by American Experiment Senior Policy Fellow Katherine Kersten that described the egregious politicization of the Edina Public Schools (EPS). The article was entitled “Whose Values? Educational excellence threatened by ideology in Edina schools.” To say it stirred up a “Hornets’ nest” would be putting it mildly.

The article showed how the ideology of racial identity politics—which holds that “white privilege” is to blame for all problems minority groups face—now dominates Edina’s schools. It included disturbing accounts by students and parents of classroom indoctrination, and of the bullying of students who hold non-conforming views on the ideological trinity of “race, class, and gender.”

Since the article appeared, Kersten has gathered troubling new information on what’s happening in the Edina schools. We now have more details on what it means—in district leaders’ minds—to view all “teaching and learning experiences” through the lens of racial “equity” as EPS’s “All for All” plan requires. The article that follows provides an update.

Kersten’s original article provided strong evidence that sweeping changes must occur if the Edina schools are to return to the proper mission of public education. But many Edina residents resisted this conclusion. In part, this was because the families who described alarming classroom persecution to the Center were reluctant to speak out publicly, fearing retaliation against their

students in the form of public shaming and lowered grades.

Now, however, one family has courageously stepped forward to tell its story. The account makes clear the Edina school district’s “racial equity” agenda is actually driving out some of the very students it is ostensibly designed to benefit.

Orlando Flores is the father of a Hispanic student who left Edina High School (EHS) to pursue Postsecondary Enrollment Options in Fall 2017, his senior year, because of what Flores calls “the pervasive ‘viewpoint discrimination’ and closed-mindedness” being taught at the school. The Flores family’s unique personal background gives the issue special urgency for them.

Orlando Flores and his parents escaped a Marxist regime in Nicaragua in 1979. “We became refugees to avoid the political indoctrination that is the hallmark of absolutist regimes and intolerant philosophies,” he said in an interview. “We can’t stand by silently now while any group—from the right, left or wherever—moves to squelch freedom of expression here in America, in our children’s public schools.”

The Flores’ son was an outstanding student at EHS, a National Merit semifinalist who scored at the highest level in many Advanced Placement classes and exams, according to his father.

His son experienced and witnessed many instances of political indoctrination and viewpoint repression while at EHS, Flores says. Finally, one particularly disturbing event led the family to say

“enough.”

In the 2016-17 school year, his junior year, Flores’ son took a required 11th-grade English class from a teacher who, like others at EHS, regularly used class time to “criticize politicians and political principles” with which they disagreed, according to Flores. When assigned to give an oral report about a “modern-day witch hunt,” Flores’ son and a classmate



Students are instructed in white supremacy and “Whiteness as property;” encouraged to tell their personal “racial awakening stories;” and led to view human beings, first and foremost, as members of racial and ethnic groups rather than unique individuals who transcend their skin color.

chose a topic “inconsistent with the teacher’s political orientation”—the actions of student protesters at the University of Missouri following high-profile racial incidents in Ferguson, Missouri.

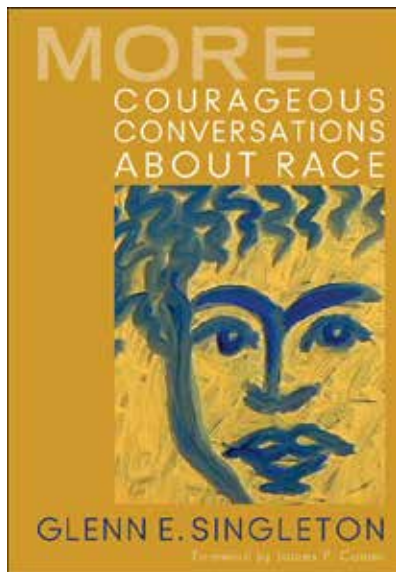
The presentation was supposed to take seven to 10 minutes. When the boys were finished, however, the teacher forced them to stand in front of the class for about 40 minutes and endure relentless criticism from both the teacher and the “most liberal students in the class—all white,” Flores’ son wrote in an email to me. (The teacher called this bringing in “multiple perspectives,” he adds.)



About the Author: Katherine Kersten, a writer and attorney, is a senior policy fellow at Center of the American Experiment. She served as a Metro columnist for the Star Tribune from 2005 to 2008, and as an opinion columnist for the paper for 15 years between 1996 and 2013. She was a founding director of the Center, and served as its chair from 1996 to 1998.

The boys asked to sit down several times, but the teacher refused to allow them to do so.

During six days of oral reports, only one other team of students was subjected to similar grilling, Flores' son wrote. This team's report—on affirmative action—also took a position contrary to the teacher's. Other presentations, which reflected liberal perspectives, “were let through without any problems” and discussion of



EHS teacher Jackie Roehl wrote an essay in *More Courageous Conversations about Race* in which she reveals that the EHS English Department purposely designed Pre-AP English 10 as a year-long vehicle for indoctrinating all sophomores in “white privilege” and racial identity politics.

them was not allowed, he says. After one such presentation, Flores' son “not only raised his hand, but shouted out, ‘Let’s discuss this,’ but the teacher refused to allow open discussion.”

“This is a typical way that bias is introduced and indoctrination occurs,” Flores told me:

Those in authority choose what they want to go unchallenged and what to suppress.... Sadly, many students told my son after his presentation that he should have known that this would happen—in other words, that it’s best to be silent and not express any con-

trary viewpoint. I, however, applaud my son for his courage.

Flores says his son felt persecuted by the classroom “witch hunt” he endured and wrote to the teacher asking for an apology. Instead, the next day, he was “abruptly” summoned to EHS Principal Bruce Locklear’s office to “clarify” the previous day’s events. He was admonished not to call his parents, but did so anyway, according to Flores.

Flores’ wife hurried to school to discuss the matter with the principal. “Like so many other documented cases” at EHS, says Flores, the principal “simply took the teacher’s side and denied any wrongdoing.”

Fearing retribution, Flores’ son asked to transfer to another English class. There, however, according to his son, a student teacher told students that they would not be reading classic texts because “dead white men are boring,” says Flores. The supervising teacher raised no objection to this remark, he says.

“After this experience and many other instances of viewpoint repression” at EHS, the Flores boy decided to leave Edina High School. The family also withdrew its 15-year-old daughter.

While at the high school, Flores’ son repeatedly saw classmates publicly humiliated and shamed, and forced to defend themselves from groundless charges of racism, according to his father. He told his parents that many teachers “immediately group and label” students who “don’t agree with them 100 percent.” He also reported that “discussion sessions” at the school are often really “one-sided indoctrination sessions, not true, multifaceted discussions.” In fact, in his son’s 11th-grade English class, the teacher often stopped his son during “discussions” and “wouldn’t even let alternative views be talked about in her class,” Flores said.

Flores describes what he views as a pervasive, and dangerous, problem at Edina High School. His son and other minority students who have been persecuted—“some of the brightest in the school”—left Edina High, he says, adding:

These are not isolated cases. There

are more minority families who have pulled their kids from EHS because the kids are tired of feeling different and separate by the school’s relentless obsession with race—which has permeated every aspect of teaching and class in the school—and because they want a better education where strong academics are taught without fear of retribution.

Flores emphasizes that he believes race and racism need to be discussed, alongside other factors that affect academic performance, such as socioeconomic differences. However, “relentlessly obsessing about them and pretending that race is the only thing that matters is counterproductive and harmful to everyone, especially those whom it seeks to help, as experienced by my son and other minorities” at EHS, Flores says.

Flores urges EHS leaders to take a new path forward that starts with strong academics and help for new immigrants and low-income students, who—unlike many Edina students—can’t afford tutors to “bridge gaps in their education.”

Clearly, EPS’s racial equity plan is a failure in two important respects. First, it has created a school climate—especially at Edina High School—that is toxically intolerant of diversity of thought.

Second, it has failed to accomplish its goal of improving the academic performance of black and Hispanic students. Between July 2014 and June 2017, the district’s Achievement and Integration Plan sought to increase student proficiency on all state reading accountability tests and to decrease performance gaps between white students and black, Hispanic and low-income students.

But at the end of the period, overall reading proficiency had not improved, nor was the racial-ethnic achievement gap reduced. In fact, scores for black, Hispanic and white students actually dropped, while Asian students’ performance stayed the same.

How much have taxpayers spent on EPS’s racial equity campaign—now nearly a decade old? Costs have included pricey national and local “diversity” consultants; sweeping equity training for district employees; equity-related



Roehl's detailed description of the new course's ideological motive and content confirms that the high school is substituting political indoctrination for legitimate academic instruction—and apparently seriously dumbing down instruction in the process.

positions within individual schools; and a variety of race-focused events for parents and students.

Parents are left in the dark

Since my original *Thinking Minnesota* article appeared, the Center has learned more about how racial identity politics became entrenched in the Edina schools, and how this extremist ideology has affected the curriculum.

One important source of information on this point was an essay penned in an unguarded moment by EHS English teacher Jackie Roehl. Roehl was a designer of Pre-AP English 10, the required 10th-grade English class at Edina High School that forms the ideological

backbone of the school's "racial equity" indoctrination.

EHS introduced Pre-AP English 10 and made it a required course in 2012-13, around the time the All for All plan made racial identity politics a centerpiece of the EHS curriculum. In an announcement to parents and students, the high school portrayed the new course as a rigorous class designed to "provide students with a common experience" and enhance "citizenship."

But Roehl painted a radically different picture in an essay she wrote for *More Courageous Conversations about Race*—a publication of the Pacific Educational Group (PEG). PEG served as a diversity consultant for EPS for several

years starting in 2009.

In her essay, Roehl reveals that, in fact, the EHS English Department purposely designed Pre-AP English 10 as a year-long vehicle for indoctrinating all sophomores in "white privilege" and racial identity politics. Students are instructed in white supremacy and "Whiteness as property;" encouraged to tell their personal "racial awakening stories;" and led to view human beings, first and foremost, as members of racial and ethnic groups rather than unique individuals who transcend their skin color. Roehl's essay, and my post about it on the Center's website, can be accessed at <https://www.american-experiment.org/2017/10/teacher-reveals-required-english-course-aims-eradicate-white-privilege-edina-high/>.

Making matters worse, the Center learned that a new analysis of the texts used in Pre-AP English 10 suggests that their average reading difficulty (Lexile) is at approximately the fifth-grade level. The analysis was performed by a group of Edina residents who consulted Lexile.com—the website of the organization that developed the Lexile Framework for Reading—to determine the reading level of the books, and then averaged the Lexiles of core and "choice" books in a way that reflected their potential use in the course.

When EHS announced the new required Pre-AP English 10 course in 2012, it claimed that student assignments would be "carefully chosen" for their "rigor," since "we're aiming for the top." In fact, the texts used in the course do not prepare 10th-grade students for future academic challenges, either in high school or college, if the new analysis is correct.

Not surprisingly, most of the books used in the course are contemporary works with political themes, or works that lend themselves to interpretation through a "race, class, gender" lens. Even assignments that don't appear to be ideological on the surface can be twisted to fit an agenda. For example, EHS's 2012 announcement of the new course lists a unit on Fort Snelling, and then notes that Fort Snelling will be studied "as a concentration camp and Dakota genocide."

EHS's design and implementation of

Pre-AP English 10 is a textbook example of political propaganda. Propagandists attempt to manipulate people to achieve their ends by disguising their real agenda. Roehl's detailed description of the new course's ideological motive and content confirms that the high school is substituting political indoctrination for legitimate academic instruction—and apparently seriously dumbing down instruction in the process.

New information about “white privilege” training for staff

Since the publication of my *Thinking Minnesota* article, the Center has also learned more about how EPS's focus on racial “equity” has shaped professional development for teachers and staff members.

For example, after the article appeared, the widow of a former Edina school bus driver told us that EPS had compelled her husband to attend “white privilege” training in 2012, and that he had found its ideological bias so appalling he had saved the materials. She forwarded them to us.

The training session, which took place on July 19, 2012, was entitled “Edina School District Equity and Racial Justice Training: Moving from a Diversity to a Social Justice Lens.” A Minneapolis-based organization called the Hackman Consulting Group conducted the session. Other Edina school employees also apparently attended the training, along with bus drivers.

The Hackman Group is operated by Heather Hackman, a former St. Cloud State University professor. According to her group's website, Hackman consults nationally on “issues of deep diversity, equity and social justice and has focused most of her recent training work on issues of racism and white privilege, gender oppression, heterosexism and homophobia, and classism.”

Sample trainings listed on the website include “Developing a Critical Racial Equity Lens: Addressing Race, Racism and Whiteness in Education” and “Teaching Climate Change Through a Social Justice Lens.”

The Hackman Group training session

DEMANDING A VOICE

Edina Young Conservatives Club responds to student bullying and school indifference by filing a lawsuit in federal court.

On December 7, 2017, the EHS Young Conservatives Club (YCC) and five of its student members brought a lawsuit against defendants Edina Public Schools, Superintendent John Schultz, and Edina High School Principal Andrew Beaton.

The suit—filed in federal district court in Minnesota—followed years of violations of students' constitutional rights to freedom of speech by Edina school authorities. Its context was set, in part, by the district's decision in 2013 to view all “district work,” “initiatives,” “teaching” and “learning” through the “lens” of racial equity.

The students filed the suit after Principal Beaton banned the Young Conservatives Club—a non-sponsored, unofficial Edina High School (EHS) student club—on November 13. Briefly, the facts are these:

On November 9, EHS sponsored a Veterans Day assembly in the school gym. A group of veterans spoke about their service to America, and the National Anthem and “Taps” were played. During these songs, a group of

students chose to “protest” by refusing to stand, sprawling on the gym floor by the bleachers, and disrupting the event by talking loudly and playing music on their cell phones.

Members of the YCC criticized the protesters' conduct, both at school and on social media. Over the following weekend, the protesting students and their supporters denounced the YCC on social media (see nearby examples), and YCC members continued their criticism.

Shortly thereafter, a group calling itself the “Edina High School Anti-Fascists” posted a YouTube video in which a masked student issued threats against the YCC. A mechanical voice ominously intoned the threats, which included statements like “we at EHS Anti-fascists have decided that your club cannot continue to exist in its current form” and “[w]e will not stop until every tentacle of your evil monstrosity is sliced off at the nerve.”

The “Anti-Fascists” demanded that the YCC “remove every student who has frequented racism from your club” and closed with a final threat: “Consider yourselves warned.”

The Young Conservatives Club complained to Beaton about these threats, but—according to the lawsuit complaint—he “simply excused” their harassers.





A group calling itself the “Edina High School Anti-Fascists” posted a YouTube video in which a student hid behind a Guy Fawkes mask and issued threats against the YCC. A mechanical voice ominously intoned the threats, which included statements like “we at EHS Anti-fascists have decided that your club cannot continue to exist in its current form” and “[w]e will not stop until every tentacle of your evil monstrosity is sliced off at the nerve.”

Subsequently, in a public communication on November 13, EPS Superintendent John Schultz called the Antifa video “inflammatory and creepy,” but dismissed the fears of YCC members and their parents on grounds that an investigation had “uncovered no credible or legal threat.” (Schultz’s reaction would likely have been very different if the YCC had issued threats like this against EHS’s Black Student Union.)

Meanwhile, the Veterans Day protesters and their supporters continued to threaten and harass the conservative students. Groups “as large as 30 students were daily surrounding club members and threatening to injure them if they did not change their political views,” according to the complaint.

One of the student plaintiffs confirmed this in an interview: The protesters and their allies “crowded YCC members in the hall, pushed them into lockers, taunted them, threatened to beat them up, and chased them,” she said. “Some of the kids were afraid to come to school. They only walked in the halls in groups, or tried to find alternative routes to class.”

But when the YCC students told Beaton they feared for their safety, he “responded to their security concerns by saying that

[they had] brought it upon themselves by criticizing the protests” at the Veterans Day program, according to the complaint.

According to the complaint, on November 13 Principal Beaton called the president of the YCC into his office, demanded to examine his cell phone, looked at the club’s GroupMe (a private group text messaging app), and then ordered the president to disband the club by deleting its GroupMe. In addition, Beaton suspended four students who had criticized the protesters on the private GroupMe.

Yet EHS authorities apparently took no disciplinary action against the Veterans Day protesters; the students who posted insulting and disparaging messages about YCC members on social media; or those who physically threatened and harassed the conservative students to the point of causing them to fear for their safety.

“EPS’s policies suggest that ‘all are welcome here,’” concludes the complaint, “but what EPS really means is that all are welcome except conservatives.”

The YCC’s federal lawsuit asserts that the Edina school district has violated the student plaintiffs’ rights of freedom of speech and association under the First Amendment. ■

for school bus drivers and other EPS employees was an exercise in ideological re-education uncomfortably reminiscent of tactics employed by authoritarian regimes.

The instructional materials called for trainers to berate and humiliate district employees, labeling them racists who profit immorally every day from “white privilege.” During the session, employees were exhorted to denounce their own presumed bigotry, acknowledge their guilt, transform their self-understanding, and embrace the Edina school dis-

Hackman trainers— astonishingly—asserted that white racism is biological in nature.

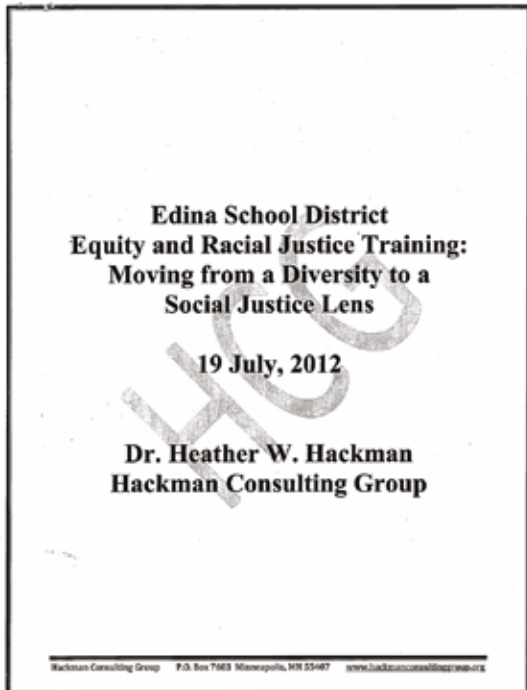
**“White conditioning
begins when white bodies
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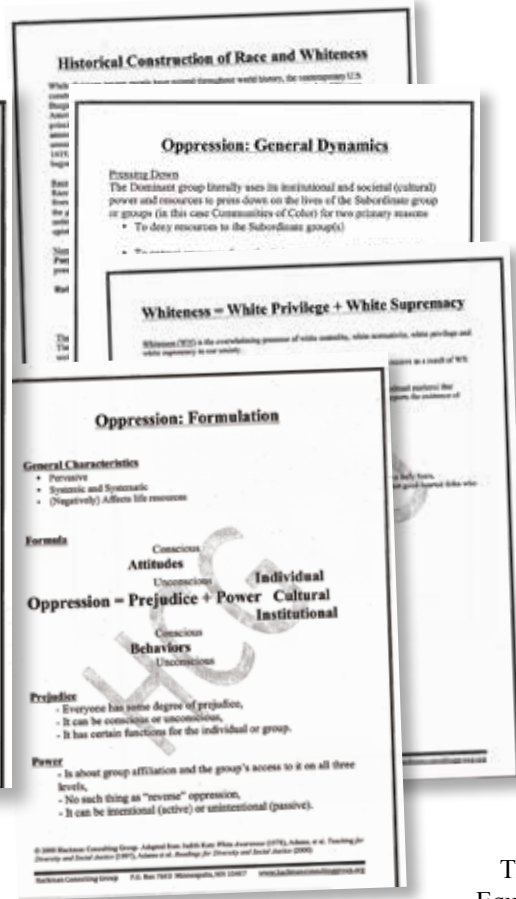
Trainers instructed district employees that “dismantl[ing] white privilege” is “the core of our work as white folks.” This “work,” they maintained, will “requir[e] a major paradigm shift in the thinking of white people.” A paradigm shift in one’s thinking is a lot to demand from individuals who simply want to drive a bus for the Edina schools.

The “Edina School District Equity and Racial Justice Training” materials included a bizarre history lesson that exemplifies their extremist nature. In a lesson entitled “The Invention of the White Race,” participants were taught that the white race did not exist until the last several hundred years. According to the materials,

The 18th and 19th centuries saw the emergence of the ‘white race’ as a deliberately constructed social group for the first time in U.S., and perhaps, in world history. The reason for this was two-fold:



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- 1) To codify the political, economic, and cultural ‘superiority’ of whites,
- 2) To drive a wedge between poor whites and people of color, thus minimizing their identification with each other and organizing against the power of the white elite.

This preposterous claim is intended to justify the “power” equation at the heart of the Edina School District’s racial equity ideology—“Whiteness=White Privilege + White Supremacy,” as the training materials put it.

Equity trainers used the following definitions to explain to bus drivers the need for white guilt:

Whiteness (WN) is the overwhelming presence of white centrality, white normativity and white supremacy in our society.

White Privilege (WP) is the systems of advantages and benefits that white folks receive as a result of WN and racism in our society.

White Supremacy (WS) is the ideology (values, beliefs, ideals and cultural markers) that justifies racism on all levels (individually, culturally and institutionally) and supports the existence of WP.

The training materials asserted that “Whites are actively taught not to see their privilege: They are meant not to notice the benefits and advantages they get as a result of being white.”

The reason? “Super Whitey”—a menacing figure undefined in the materials—“likes to keep whites oblivious to these benefits.” Black people, trainers insisted, cannot be racists.

The “Edina School District Equity and Racial Justice Training” session concluded with role-playing by participants, in which they were required to parrot back the ideological orthodoxies they had absorbed.

The Edina school bus driver’s widow who sent us the Hackman materials said that, according to her husband, drivers who attended the training were not allowed to disagree with or debate the group’s premises. The widow added that her husband told her that participants who seemed inattentive or resistant could be required to repeat the training.

Edina bus drivers were not the only EPS employees subjected to Hackman-led racial equity training. Teachers, staff and administrators were compelled to attend equity training—which included Hackman sessions as an option—as part of EPS’s Achievement and Integration Plan, effective July 2014 to June 2017.

The Center does not have the training materials used in these sessions. But their ideological tenor is suggested by a promotional flyer for a workshop for educators and others that the Hackman Group facilitated in 2015. The

workshop was entitled “More Than Skin Deep: Uprooting White Privilege and White Supremacy One Cell at a Time.”

At this workshop, Hackman trainers—astonishingly—asserted that white racism is biological in nature. “White conditioning begins when white bodies are preverbal,” according to the flyer for the session. Participants will learn about the “connection between systems of RRW [race, racism and whiteness] and nervous system patterns in the individual and social body of white people.”

As a result for white people, the “work” of racial equity “is about literally becoming a different person from the cells out,” according to the flyer “In order to end systems of racial dominance, we have to end whiteness. Period.”

It’s safe to say that most Edina residents would reject the racial “equity” training just described as directly at odds with America’s color-blind vision of racial matters. School district leaders’ decision to require teachers and other staff to submit to extremist Hackman Group-type training raises serious questions about both their ideological commitments and their judgment.

Working for the Edina Public Schools: Only social justice warriors need apply?

The EPS’s All for All plan calls for the “recruitment, hiring and retention of racially conscious teachers and administrators.” It’s no surprise, then, that the district’s application for teaching jobs includes an ideological litmus test that appears designed to weed out applicants who diverge from the party line.

Two questions with this apparent intent are included in the Edina Public



Jackie Roehl @roehlenglish - 15 Nov 2014
 @HackmanGroup thanks for a great climate justice session @hattenglish @trendspanish



The Hackman Group is operated by Heather Hackman (center), founder of the Hackman Group that consults with EHS. According to her group’s website, Hackman consults nationally on “issues of deep diversity, equity and social justice and has focused most of her recent training work on issues of racism and white privilege, gender oppression, heterosexism and homophobia, and classism.”

Schools Employment Application form on the EPS website.

The first asks applicants to “[i]dentify what is/isn’t happening in education that contributes to the achievement gap between white students and students of color. In your role, how would you help resolve this dilemma?”

This question *assumes* that “inequity” in school—undefined, and presumably perpetrated by teachers—is responsible for the failure of black children to perform, on average, at the academic level of white children. Phrased as it is, the question gives applicants no opportunity to discuss the role of socioeconomic factors, such as family breakdown, that contribute to the achievement gap but are beyond schools’ control.

The second question is similar: “Describe an example where you identified

inequity and describe what steps you took as a response.” Again, the question *presupposes* that applicants have seen inequitable conduct by teachers or students in schools, and requires them to describe their response to it even if they believe they have not.

The Edina teacher application also asks candidates how strongly they agree or disagree with 10 statements about race or ethnicity, like the following:

- “It’s important to recognize that a student’s cultural background may influence his/her ability to learn.”
- “It’s natural for students with similar backgrounds to congregate/sit together in the cafeteria.”
- “Students’ cultural backgrounds affect how they perceive teachers.”
- “Teachers should talk with each other about how students’ cultural backgrounds impact their behavior.”

Many applicants may wonder what the officially approved “equitable” answer is to some of these questions. For example, is it racist to think black students “naturally” want to sit together at lunch, or is it racist to think the opposite? One thing seems certain: Candidates who guess wrong will not become teachers in the Edina Public Schools.

Since the publication of my original *Thinking Minnesota* article on racial identity politics in the Edina Public Schools, district leaders have made clear they do not intend to modify or re-examine their curriculum or policies. Students and families will pay the price. In the end, only the citizens of Edina can ensure—through public demand—that their schools provide legitimate education, rather than political indoctrination. ★