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Fairfax County
Public Schools

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TO: Angela Woolsey, FFXnow.com
FROM: Dr. Ricardy Anderson and Ms. Karen Keys-Gamarra
DATE: February 23, 2023
SUBJECT: AP African American Studies

In response to your inquiry regarding the letter submitted by some board members concerning the suggestion that the AP African American Studies course may be prohibited in Virginia, we provide the following response:

The fact that we were not signatories on the letter has nothing to do with our lack of support for the course or the need for policymakers to avoid unnecessary obstacles that rob our students of important opportunities or resist attempts to whitewash Virginia history.

Rather, we believe we could have benefitted from intentional collaboration with our Board colleagues, other Northern Virginia school boards, and organizations engaged in education work to present a more robust and impactful argument.

As written, the letter did not include essential historical context that would emphasize the extent of the crisis currently impacting K-12 public education, including but not limited to the fact this administration which sits in the Commonwealth, formerly known as the Seat of the Confederacy, is now advocating for practices that disregard the freedom to learn factual information that is a part of our collective American History. There was no mention that such actions are reminiscent of racist practices that prohibited African Americans from learning to read and Jim Crow laws legalizing separate but unequal spaces and access.

The potential elimination of such courses segregates information for the benefit of a worldview that excludes the accomplishments of African Americans.

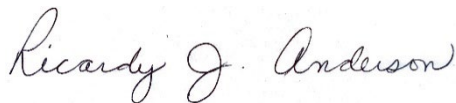
Additionally, the letter did not acknowledge that prohibiting or diminishing such a course harms all students, not just those of African American descent. Moreover, restricting access to this history, places Virginia students at a distinct competitive disadvantage as their lack of knowledge could impede their ability to excel at the college level and beyond.

This potential action is a slippery slope that will no doubt lead to further limitations to the ability of Virginia students to learn about diverse perspectives. If we are truly dedicated to excellence in our public schools, then we must also commit to the freedom to learn without state-imposed censorship.

The potential blockage of this course also communicates that studying the lives of African Americans is not valuable enough to be included at the highest levels of our learning where essential critical thinking skills are developed.

Furthermore, we believe the ultimate goal of this Board is to provide excellent education and promote academic excellence. Our collective work should move toward these goals.

We believe in addition to providing a unified voice on these issues, our Board should also consider its focus on initiatives that guide the implementation of equitable access to education. It is critically important that we complete our work to develop policies and resolutions that communicate our position to support, encourage, and insist upon the development of rigorous academic content delivered through an equitable lens. This is an imperative mandate without which all students suffer. We look forward to working with our Board and community toward these goals.



Ricardy J. Anderson, Ed.D.
Mason District



Karen Keys-Gamarra, J.D.
Member At Large