

Protests and sick-outs continue in Colorado against “patriotic” curriculum

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Teachers at Jefferson and Golden High Schools outside Denver, Colorado called in sick September 29, continuing their protests against proposals by the school board to alter the US history curriculum and institute new evaluation measures. Eighty-one and 70 percent, respectively, of the teachers had called in sick the night before, forcing the closure of the schools.

A number of students gathered outside the Golden High School campus that morning to show their support for the teachers. The week before, hundreds of students at Jefferson County high schools participated in walkouts and demonstrations against changes to the US history curriculum proposed by the Jefferson County school board’s three-person majority, the self-styled “Board Committee for Curriculum Review.”

The committee’s proposal, presented by board member Julie Williams, listed among its demands that “Materials should promote citizenship, patriotism, essentials and benefits of the free enterprise system... respect for authority” and “should not encourage or condone civil disorder, social strife or disregard of the law. Instructional materials should present positive aspects of the United States and its heritage.” The proposal calls this whitewashing of political and social movements in history as “balanced and factual treatment of the positions.”

“Education should not have limitation,” said Stuart Shanley, a senior at Chatfield Senior High School, who participated in a walkout last week. “To censor what is taught will only hurt the future. Those who ignore history are doomed to repeat it,” he told the WWSW in an interview.

About 30 students picketed in front of Jefferson High School, demanding, “We have a right to know history.” Golden High School student Rachel Hilbrecht told CBS Denver, “America was founded on civil disobedience,

so it’s very bothersome that that wants to be taken out.”

Several dozen students at Carmody Middle School in Lakewood staged their own brief protest September 30, waving signs and chanting, “Don’t censor history!” One eighth grader, Dalton Henderson, accused the district of “trying to take our history away.” One student was ticketed for jaywalking, and police threatened the others with summonses if they blocked the street. This was the first instance of younger students joining the protests.

The sickout was the latest in a number of teacher and student protests going back to September 19, when about 50 teachers called in sick. A statement the next day by the teachers decried the board’s “arbitrary, nontransparent evaluation system that vests absolute authority in administrators” and a curriculum that would “require teachers to ignore certain aspects of American history.”

Tellingly, the teachers union, the Jefferson County Education Association (JCEA), has kept a low profile throughout the three weeks of protests. A JCEA press release stated that while the union “is aware of the situation... This was not organized by JCEA but we certainly understand the frustration our teachers and the entire community are experiencing...”

The Jefferson County board proposal is in line with right-wing efforts nationwide to revise the Advanced Placement US History (APUSH) curriculum, which opponents denounce for its supposed overemphasis on protest movements and expression of “anti-American” sentiments.

On September 27, the *Wall Street Journal* ran an op-ed piece advocating the creation of “national unity” through “patriotic” education. The piece, “Democracy requires a Patriotic Education,” by Donald Kagan, calls

for an educational system that promotes a “common American culture.” He writes, “We live in a time when civic devotion has been undermined and national unity is under attack. The idea of a common American culture... is under assault, and attempts are made to replace it with narrower and politically divisive programs that are certain to set one group of Americans against another.”

Amidst the growing drive to war and soaring inequality, the US ruling class increasingly sees the need to more nakedly suppress and stifle political opposition. The attempt to rewrite history and promote “patriotic values” in schools goes hand in hand with the broader attack on democratic rights in the United States, including domestic spying and the militarization of the police.



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