

# Protests continue after Colorado school board refuses to back down on 'patriotic' curriculum

D. Lencho  
6 October 2014

Protests by students and teachers continued Friday after the Jefferson County, Colorado school board refused to back down on its plans to conduct a review of high school US history curriculum aimed at promoting "patriotism."

At a Thursday meeting, the school board's three-member right-wing majority carried a vote to go ahead with a proposed review of the AP US history curriculum. The proposal was amended to include students on review boards in what the right-wing school board majority attempted to present as a "compromise."

Students told the local CBS station, however, that they believed that the measures are entirely cosmetic, and that the school board majority would still be in control of the review proceedings. Students and teachers organized rallies throughout the county the next day.

Thursday's meeting of the Jefferson County (Jeffco) Board of Education drew hundreds of students, parents and teachers, the majority of whom voiced their opposition to the proposed changes.

An hour before it began, hundreds of students, teachers and parents had gathered outside the building for a rally against the revision. High school student Ashlyn Maher told the crowd that there are already two committees that address curriculum concerns, and "Why the board majority believes they need their own select, special committee smacks of a hidden agenda."

The majority of speakers at the meeting, adult and student alike, voiced opposition to the revamping. Several speakers called for the board majority to resign. An online petition to that effect, containing over 40,000 signatures, was submitted. A PTA member denounced

claims that protesters were "ignorant pawns," referring to hundreds of emails and phone calls the organization had received.

Another speaker said, "It's time the board majority disenthral itself with the idea that it's only the teachers union that disagrees with its actions." In fact, the JCEA teachers union has not officially engaged in the protest actions, limiting itself to expressions of sympathy for the protesters and criticisms of the board majority.

By a vote of 3 to 2, the board made some alterations to its proposal, which the majority attempted to portray as a "compromise." The board will adapt the curriculum review process to include parents, students, curriculum specialists, teachers and community members, but they will be appointed by the board. That, and the majority's refusal to consider delaying its implementation and its vagueness on what it will do about the history curriculum, left many attendees suspicious of the board's intentions.

One parent, who said she was frustrated with the board's refusal to listen to those who opposed the history curriculum proposal, said, "This is tyranny in slow motion. This is how it happens. We all need to stand up and raise our voices." Ashlyn Maher told reporters, "This isn't over. We are going to fight until we see some results."

The original proposal made by board member Julie Williams called for the formation of a committee to review the curriculum, with the goal of tailoring material to "promote citizenship, patriotism, essentials and benefits of the free enterprise system, respect for authority and respect for individual rights," and "present positive aspects of the United States and its heritage," especially its supposed "exceptionalism,"

while cutting materials that “encourage or condone civil disorder, social strife or disregard of the law.”

In defense of the proposal, Williams made a number of claims about the current APUSH curriculum including that it overemphasized negative aspects of US history, skipped over seminal figures and glorified law-breaking.

Williams’ claims were discredited by APUSH designers and teachers, as well as reporters for news station KDVR, who showed that her assertion that figures like Thomas Jefferson and Martin Luther King, Jr. were not mentioned in the curriculum was an outright falsehood.

Teachers and students reacted to the proposal with sickouts by the former and street protests by the latter. In the course of the protests, other issues—festered since the new school board began its term last year—reemerged. Primary among them was the linking of teacher pay raises to evaluations.

One teacher sent an email to the co.chalkbeat.org web site to voice her support for the sickouts, explaining: “The board majority has refused to work with teachers to develop a fair and equitable pay system...blames teachers for the student unrest...and [they] have shown great disrespect for the voices of our advanced placement students who are concerned about their education.”

Parents have also articulated a number of concerns. One mother, Amanda Stevens, told chalkbeat that she became suspicious early on upon hearing that the board planned to do away with a school readiness evaluation program and full-day kindergarten at the same time that it was channeling more money toward charter schools and pushing for vouchers.

Students and families in poorer Jeffco neighborhoods fear additional negative impacts of the proposed curriculum changes. Jefferson High School has a large percentage of lower-income students; almost 90 percent qualify for free or reduced lunch prices. Lower-income students aspiring to college take Advanced Placement classes in hopes of earning college credit and reducing college tuition and other expenses.

A recent grant, which eliminates or lowers the \$100-plus fee for AP courses, has helped double the number of Jefferson High students signing up for the courses, not only in history, but in math, science and English. Protesting Jefferson High students and their

parents fear that the curriculum changes would undo these gains and increase the obstacles they face.

The fears expressed by the Jefferson High students and parents were amplified the day after Thursday’s school board meeting when the College Board, which produces the AP courses and the SAT test, announced that it would refuse to let its name be associated with the US history course if significant changes were made to the curriculum.

Williams’ demand that the changes should emphasize “facts” over the sake of “ideology”—a favorite code word employed by ruling-class apologists to discredit socialism—holds a special irony, considering that the ideology of the “free market” is contradicted every day by objective facts: rising unemployment and impoverishment for the working class as the super-rich accumulate unimaginable wealth.

The machinations of the Jeffco school board majority are not just a controversy confined to one school district in Colorado. They are a reflection of broader fears within the US ruling class over growing questioning of and resistance to its trajectory of war, austerity, inequality and repression.

The move to alter the curriculum comes amid a general rise in police violence, the growth of surveillance and the setting up of a police-state framework. The attempt to change the curriculum is a preemptive strike against critical thought and the consideration of alternatives to the rotting capitalist system, in particular socialism.



To contact the WSWS and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://wsws.org/contact)**