

June 7, 2010

FROM: Dr. Richard M. Swier  
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TO: Shirley Brown  
Chair, Sarasota County School Board  
1960 Landing Boulevard  
Sarasota, FL 34231-3331

RE: Appeal to the use of *World History: Patterns of Interaction* as the Primary Instructional Material for World History classes in Sarasota Public High Schools

Per School Board Policy 4.30, this letter constitutes an appeal to the Sarasota County School Board.

I request that the School Board overturn the May 26, 2010 decision by Superintendent Lori M. White to keep the textbook *World History: Patterns of Interaction* by McDougal Littell as the primary instructional material for Sarasota High School World History classes for the remainder of the adoption cycle.

One of the members of the review committee stated, "I feel the book is biased and it (sugar coats) history. The complaint is valid". I agree and I now present the case to the School Board as to why this is so.

There are five primary reasons that Superintendent White's recommendation is ill advised and must be overturned. They are:

1. The review committee violated School Board Policy.
2. Original adoption of *World History* violated Florida Sunshine Laws.
3. The district staff committee members lack appropriate academic credentials.
4. The committee did not specifically address all of the individual issues raised in the Patron's Request for Reconsideration of Instructional Material and the study submitted by Dr. Terri K. Wonder as required by School Board Policy 4.30.
5. The District potentially faces increased legal liability from students and parents by retaining this textbook per School Board Policy 4.21.

The following paragraphs discuss in detail why the School Board must overturn the Superintendent's decision.

**Reason #1 - The Review Committee violated School Board Policy.**

According to School Board (SB) Policy 4.30, IV.C:

"The committee's review shall be treated objectively, unemotionally, and in a business-like manner and shall be conducted in the best interests of the student, the school, and the community."

It is clear from the official minutes that the advisory committee did not follow SB Policy.

According to the minutes the majority of the twenty-five recorded comments are from staff members Kathy Vanderee (4), Juan Esparra (4), and George Kenny (5). Emotional bias against the complainant is evident in the minutes.

Some examples of emotional bias include:

Kathy Vanderee – “Wish he [Dr. Swier] would learn how to count. Found no incident of ‘I believe’ – ‘I know’. Did not find it to be a valid challenge. Not factually incorrect.”

Juan Esparra – “He [Dr. Swier] should have read book.”

George Kenny – “Go about this a different way – Does the complainant [Dr. Swier] have any valid statements? No Response.”

Additionally, Dr. Terri K. Wonder’s comprehensive fourteen page study does not appear to have been considered as it was not mentioned by any of the committee members. In a May 24, 2010 e-mail Mr. Scott Ferguson said, “Ancillary materials, including Dr. Terri Wonder’s paper (which, as you noted, was also sent to the school district), were presented to the committee.”

The following statements by committee members indicate that Dr. Wonder’s specific examples of historical inaccuracies and biases of *World History* in her study were not considered:

- [Textbook] Not factually incorrect.
- Does the complainant [Dr. Swier] have any valid statements? [No mention of Dr. Wonder]
- Complaint 5 Koran is the Holy Book. Hadith is not.
- Found no incident of ‘I believe’ – ‘I know’.
- Do we have consensus on the book being historically accurate? Unanimous

These statements indicate Dr. Wonder’s study was either not read and fully comprehended or totally ignored.

Because it appears the advisory committee was emotionally biased, not objective and did not review all the materials provided in the Patron’s Request and Dr. Wonder’s study, complainant believes that the committee violated SB Policy 4.30.

**Conclusion:** The advisory committee did not conduct an objective, unemotional and business like review of all provided materials objecting to *World History: Patterns of Interaction* in accordance with SB Policy 4.30.

## **Reason #2 – Original adoption of *World History* violated Florida Sunshine Laws.**

Mr. Scott Ferguson stated in a May 3, 2010 e-mail to complainant, "While citizens are welcome to ask questions and express their opinions about any textbook at any time using the proper channels, the meetings of these textbook committees are not required to be noticed to the public since the committees are not appointed by the School Board and do not directly advise the School Board."

On May 24, 2010 complainant inquired about when the meeting of the committee to review the Patron's Request for Reconsideration submitted on April 25, 2010 will be held. Complainant was notified the committee had met and a recommendation forwarded to the Superintendent.

In a May 24, 2010 e-mail Mr. Ferguson stated, "The [advisory committee] meeting was open to the public; the time, date and place were posted for seven days in advance in two places on the district website (the public meetings page and the events calendar)."

According to SB Policy 4.21 and 4.30 the textbook and review committees are both advisory, neither is appointed by nor directly advises the School Board. Therefore, the review committee should not have been noticed.

By noticing the review committee the district violated its own criteria for committees established under SB Policy 4.00. The noticing of the review committee may be *prima facie* evidence that the committee that adopted *World History* in 2005 should have also been noticed, thereby invalidating this textbook as primary instructional material.

**Conclusion:** There is a lack of clarity in stated district criteria, SB Policy 4.21 and 4.30 as to whether or not committee meetings under SB Policy 4.00 should be noticed in accordance with Florida Sunshine Laws. This lack of clarity subjects the School Board to legal challenges for violation of Florida Sunshine Laws.

### **Reason #3 – The district staff committee members lack appropriate academic credentials.**

There is no appointment letter from the Superintendent forming the review committee under SB Policy 4.30. Rather Dr. Sharon Richert was verbally tasked to form the committee.

A review of the academic credentials of district staff committee members shows none hold a degree in history, world history, religion, religious movements, world cultures or world movements. None of the district staff members of the committee have ever published in a peer reviewed journal on any of these subject areas.

The composition of the committee does not lend itself to a proper study of this textbook. Dr. Richert appears to have selected district staff solely based upon position rather than subject matter expertise. To properly review this textbook a search for those within or outside the district with subject matter expertise in the areas covered by *World History: Patterns of Interaction* should have been made.

SB Policy 4.30, IV. B only provides that the members fill certain district administrative or teaching positions. However SB Policy 4.30 does not preclude having committee members with subject matter expertise about the textbook under review. For example, if the textbook under review was Algebra II then it only makes common sense to have district staff as members of the committee with degrees in mathematics. Such is the case with the review of a World History textbook.

It should be noted that when Dr. Terri K. Wonder met with Scott Ferguson she offered the services of distinguished world history scholar Dr. Bernard Lewis, Professor Emiratis of Near Eastern Studies at Princeton University. It appears staff did not take up this offer to have a noted scholar of world history be part of the review committee.

**Conclusion:** SB Policy 4.30 should be revised to insure a preponderance of district committee members be experts in the subject matter of the textbook under review.

**Reason #4 – The committee did not specifically address all of the individual issues raised in the Patron’s Request for Reconsideration of Instructional Material and the study submitted by Dr. Terri K. Wonder.**

It is clear from the minutes of the committee meeting held on May 18, 2010 that each issue presented in the Patron’s Request for Reconsideration and the study dated April 30, 2010 by Dr. Terri K. Wonder titled Textual Supremacy in *World History: Patterns of Interaction*, A Case Study in Islamic Apologetics in American Public Education were not addressed and resolved.

The review by the committee may be summed up by the statement of George Kenney, “State adopted. Reviewed by national, state and local experts Comfortable with keeping it.”

No serious discussion was undertaken, according to the meeting minutes, of the serious inconsistencies in the textbook. These fatal flaws are best presented by Dr. Terri K. Wonder in her study of *World History: Patterns of Interaction* (attached).

Of particular note are the following problems highlighted by Dr. Wonder in her study under the section titled, Privileging Islam in *World History: Patterns of Interaction* (pages 9 to 14).

In these pages Dr. Wonder points out in great detail historical and academic inaccuracies. She also highlights de jure and de facto bias in the textbook specifically in the following areas:

**Soft-Selling “Muhammad’s Legacy” (page 9-12)**

Here Dr. Wonder analysis’s of the treatment of Western civilization with that of Islam is presented in this section. She makes specific references to this academic bias when she quotes the Summation of Unit Two, “Unlike the lands you will read about in the next chapter--which were unified by the spread of Islam--the Americas would remain a patchwork of separate civilizations until the early 16<sup>th</sup> Century”. (p.259)

Dr. Wonder states, “The writers of *World History* want readers to know the following about Islamic jihad and Muhammad’s legacy in Chapter 10:

- “tolerance of conquered peoples” (p.260)
- “unified the Arab people, both politically and through the religion of Islam” (p.263)
- “strong impact on the lives of millions today” (p.263)
- “impressive leadership skills” (p.263)
- Arabs and Jews “accepted” Muhammad’s rule (p.264)
- “persecuted people under Christian and Zoroastrian rule welcomed Islamic invaders” (p.270)

- People “were attracted to the appeal of the message of Islam, which offered equality and hope in this world” (p.270)
- “They were attracted by the economic benefit for Muslims of not having to pay a poll tax” (p.270)

Readers are informed several times throughout the text that Islamic law mandates that Muslim leaders “extend religious tolerance to Christians and Jews” (p.270) without ever explaining what might happen to them should they decide not to pay “poll taxes” (*jizya*) in order to practice their own religion. The *Quran* and centuries of Islamic law applied under Islamic rule, however, are very clear about such consequences. Non-Muslims may not only be taxed but also can be--according to the *Quran* and other Islamic sacred law--poisoned, tortured, enslaved, and slain.

In the section of Dr. Wonder’s study titled, *Omitting and Minimizing Institutionalized Slavery and Servitude in non-Western Cultures* she discusses these problems with *World History*:

- For example, the writers avoid the subject completely regarding the Zhou dynasty in ancient feudal China. Indeed, readers are informed in the early chapters of the textbook that peaceful, stable Zhou rulers can do no harm. They are repeatedly referred to as “lovers of order and harmony” (p.52). They have “respect for authority” unlike the “wicked kings” (p.51) they overthrew. However, if one wants the rest of the story about the virtuous Zhou, one won’t find it in *World History*. Ever the skeptic, I called a colleague who knows a thing or two about ancient China. He informed me that under the Zhou married aristocrats could take slaves and that the Zhou took slaves through military conquest justified as, of course, their own version of religious holy war.
- As for Islam, slavery and servitude are not mentioned at all until a very late in the textbook on page 425. Prior to that, I took notes, chapter by chapter, I continued to write statements for my future reference, “No slavery mentioned regarding this Islamic conquest” or “Still not slavery mentioned.”
- On page 425, readers are finally told, “Although Muslim traders had been enslaving East Africans and selling them since about the Ninth Century, the numbers remain small---perhaps about 1000 a year” (p.425). However, later another the writers contradict themselves. Between 650 and 1600, Muslims traded “17 million Africans” to North Africa and Southwest Asia. No matter which figure is accurate, the textbook invariably makes excuses for Muslim slave trading in sub-Saharan Africa, claiming that the Europeans involved in the slave trade were far worse than were their Muslim counterparts.

Dr. Wonder concludes the section on institutional slavery by stating:

“To minimize the influence of Muhammad’s legacy as having institutionalized the practice slavery and servitude in a public education textbook **reduces what should be history to hagiography, a sanitization of a religious leader’s legacy for the glorification and defense of a faith. This is an unconscionable act of historical analysis given that readers are informed at the outset of each unit and each chapter that things which happen in the past have relevance today.**” [Emphasis added]

None of these topics were discussed by the review committee according to their meeting minutes. None were specifically addressed, voted on and resolved. The meeting appears to have ignored Dr. Wonder's study.

**Conclusion:** The review committee did not address all of the de jure and de facto errors in *World History: Patterns of Interaction*. Therefore the review is incomplete and does not adhere to the spirit and intent of SB Policy 4.30.

**Reason #5 – The District potentially faces increased legal liability from students and parents by retaining this textbook per School Board Policy 4.21.**

SB Policy 4.21 states, "The School Board shall be legally responsible for the instructional materials used in the operation of District schools."

Dr. Terri K. Wonder points out on page 13 of her paper that Mohammed is given a "privileged" status in *World History: Patterns of Interaction*.

Dr. Wonder states:

Whereas Abraham and Ezekiel repeatedly are identified with a lower case "p" in phrases that read "The prophet Ezekiel" or "the prophet Abraham," **the writers sanctify Muhammad's status with an upper case "P"** [Emphasis added]:

- "In 630, the Prophet and 10,000 of his followers returned to Mecca" (p.264)
- "The Prophet entered the city in triumph." (p.264)
- "Soon after the Prophet's death, it was suggested that his revelation be put into a book." (p.275)
- "Early Muslim poets sang the praises of the Prophet and of Islam and, later, of the caliph and other patrons." (p.276)

According to Dr. Wonder, "The privileging of Muhammad's self-proclaimed prophet hood is a matter of faith portrayed in-text as if it were a statement of fact."

Dr. Wonder points out that by bestowing Mohammed the status of Prophet with a capital "P" the district is putting itself at risk of violating the U.S. Constitution's Establishment Clause.

Dr. Wonder finds:

"My reading of the textbook suggests a possible violation of *establishment clause*, which forbids the establishment of religion in the conduct of public education. A violation of any one of the following as decided in the case *Lemon v. Kurtzman* (1971) should raise doubts in superintendent's mind about the validity of *World History: Patterns of Interaction* (2005):

- Education must have a secular legislative purpose

- Education must not have the primary effect of either advancing or inhibiting a religion
- Education must not result in excessive government entanglement with respect to religion

These *Lemon* tests ensure that schools instruct in a fair, balanced manner about religious history and its doctrinal foundations but prevent them from assigning preference to one religion over others. If the school board adopts a defensive position and ignores the challenge, then the school board may open itself up to future litigation. It should take aggressive action to resolve the conflict thus upholding its compact with Florida to provide a quality education to students in Sarasota County.

There is no indication that the Superintendent or review committee addressed this legal liability. There is no indication that the findings of Dr. Wonder were considered or the report findings reviewed by the District's attorney.

**Conclusion:** *World History: Patterns of Interaction* according to SB Policy 4.21 puts the School Board under extreme risk for a civil law suit by parents or students.

Given the above analysis I respectfully request that *World History: Patterns of Interaction* published by McDougall Littell be removed as the primary instructional material for Sarasota high school World History classes for the remainder of the adoption cycle.

Sincerely,

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Co-Director, Florida Security Council

Cc: Dr. Kathy Kleinlein, School Board Member  
Frank Kovach, School Board Member  
Dr. Carol Todd, School Board Member  
Carolyn Zucker, School Board Member  
Superintendent Lori White