GRAND ISLAND PUBLIC SCHOOLS ON CRT, LIBRARY BOOKS, AND EQUITY

Literacy is a form of liberation.

That is why we at Grand Island Public School (GIPS) have made it a cornerstone in our strategic plan, and why we will continue to provide greater learning opportunities and free access to vital resources such as books.

Greater access to learning is part of who we are; it is core to public education; and is one way we may champion equity within our schools.

Our goal is to provide students with the opportunity to fall in love with reading; to open up the gateway of learning and discovery. We strive to put a book in the hand of every child. We invite our families to join us in these life-changing literacy efforts through things such as book fairs, Read Across America, literary celebrations, and so much more. Reading is how we learn the power of our history; learn the power of critical thought; learn the power of informed opinion; learn the power of who we are and who we can be.

We stand by our advocacy for greater literacy and we remain committed to the imperative charge of ensuring our students have free access to diverse resources that are respectful, engaging, and challenging.

The future of our students is found in literacy.

The attempt to spotlight library resources as a widespread issue worthy of scrutiny is misguided and it needs to cease. It misses the heart of what we aim for in providing rich education experiences for each and every one of our students. Especially as it pertains to the conversation surrounding Critical Race Theory (CRT).

For Grand Island Public Schools, here is our statement on CRT:

We recognize that CRT is a buzzworthy topic in public education. But we also recognize that in the arena of public discourse it can be easy to focus on the inflammatory rather than nuance.
What is commonly referred to as CRT is not a curriculum. Nor has it been formalized as a program implemented in Grand Island Public Schools. When we reference important topics surrounding the teaching of history, social studies, civics, and community engagement we have a greater responsibility as educators to speak to what is actually taking place in our classrooms; what is being taught; what is required by the state; what the Board of Education elects to implement from a policy level. The heated debate surrounding CRT, by and large, has grown to be more about headlines than practical solutions.

At Grand Island Public Schools, we advocate for equity in our district at every level from extracurricular activities, to grading, to staff training, to resources, all of it. We are a district of equity, opportunity, and excellence. We want our students to know that no matter your race, socio-economic status, or background they can graduate college and career ready.

Every student has a right to be represented in our curriculum. We also know that the process of adopting curriculum is sensitive. That is why we have always strived to be transparent with our schools, staff, families, and community about curriculum standards and initiatives. We always welcome thoughtful feedback and informed opinion from our community in that regard.

But when we speak of CRT specifically — especially as it pertains to library resources — it is important to understand that we are not speaking of curriculum; we are, instead, speaking of generic opinions and potentially misinformed anecdotes. We cannot allow ourselves to thrust our students, their diversity, nor the meaningful impact of reading into a political battleground.

**Grand Island Public Schools will not compromise the livelihood of our students nor their capacity to learn. We will continue to place vibrant education, literacy, and diverse, engaging learning opportunities at the forefront.**

We agree that race, social issues, illuminating our history, and how we advocate for our students while celebrating their heritages are vital to the efforts of empowering our students to thrive. That being said, if we are going to have this conversation let’s ensure it’s motivated by what’s important.

We invite our families and our community to collaborate with us in our efforts of building more equitable and vibrant learning environments that allow us to continue our mission of Every Student, Every Day, A Success.
We would also like to highlight that our entire library catalogs are available to the public online. They may be found HERE. Anyone in the community is welcome to use this resource.

Of course, there may be specific titles or resources some families may prefer their student not engage with. We at GIPS recognize that nuance and want to be as accommodating as possible without needlessly over-correcting through grand decisions that may be difficult to reverse. That being said, we have a policy in-place where a parent or guardian may request an exception from specific materials by completing and submitting the 9110.2 Request for Exception/Exclusion Form which may be found on the district website.

This has been and will continue to be our standard policy as a school district. We feel this approach both serves the overall best interest of access to learning in our district while still being transparent and accommodating requests on a more practical level.

We are still doing the work here. We are on a journey together; a journey to champion each and every student, to help them feel seen and to help them thrive.

Literacy is liberation. We stand by our efforts to exhibit our core values of equity and excellence throughout our district.

Let us discuss, address, and remove systemic barriers that limit opportunities; let’s bring equity to the forefront as we look to champion the potential of every single student; and let’s embrace and celebrate the rich diversity that makes our schools and communities strong. These are ideals we as a school district are committed to and we invite the community to join us in these efforts as we always have.

#1GIPSforAll,

- Dr. Tawana Grover, Superintendent
and Grand Island Public Schools Board of Education