

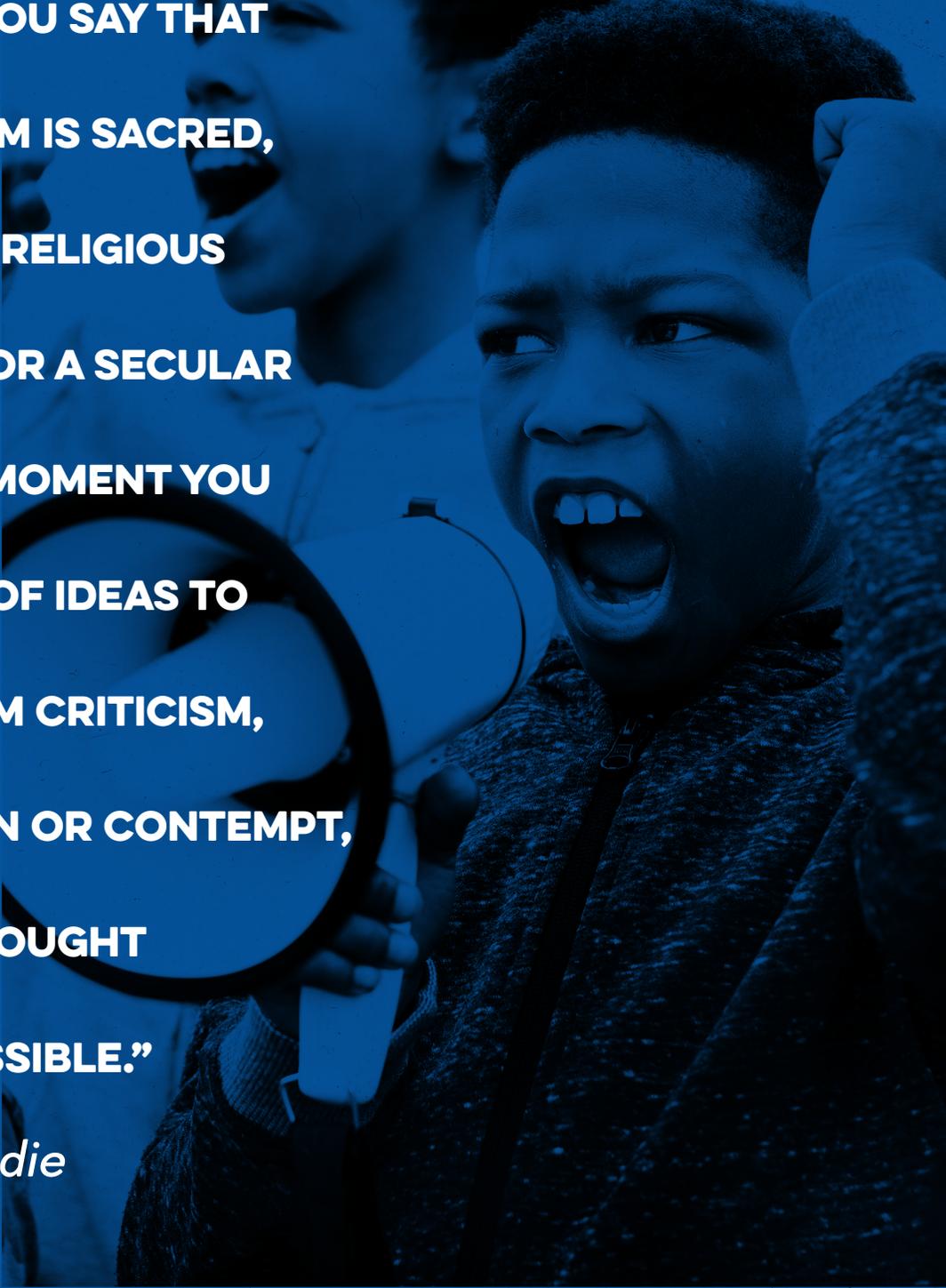
CRITICAL SOCIAL JUSTICE IN MAINE K-12 EDUCATION

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**“THE MOMENT YOU SAY THAT
ANY IDEA SYSTEM IS SACRED,
WHETHER IT'S A RELIGIOUS
BELIEF SYSTEM OR A SECULAR
IDEOLOGY, THE MOMENT YOU
DECLARE A SET OF IDEAS TO
BE IMMUNE FROM CRITICISM,
SATIRE, DERISION OR CONTEMPT,
FREEDOM OF THOUGHT
BECOMES IMPOSSIBLE.”**

– Salman Rushdie

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Critical Social Justice (CSJ), the ideological bent condemning the country as oppressive, is now in the DNA of Maine's K-12 system. As the Maine Department of Education (MDOE) commits to dismantling the inherited education system of decades ago, traditional measures of success like mastery in reading and math are showing marked signs of decline.

During spring 2022, a controversy erupted over a MDOE video resource used to teach nonbinary gender identities to kindergarteners. The Department removed the video in question following an ad campaign by the Maine GOP, a decision with which Governor Janet Mills said she agreed. While Governor Mills did not order the development of the videos, she adopted policies that make the development of such videos inevitable. Governor Mills has sought national funds for such curriculum development. She has signed bills that require schools to provide comprehensive sex education. She has built a department infused with social justice activists who are transforming Maine's education system.

The video episode reflects a system-wide commitment. Leaders across Maine, including Governor Mills, think that the education system they inherited embodies structures of racism, homophobia, misogyny, transphobia, and so on. Education, according to Governor Mills's MDOE and other stakeholders, "is one of the many systems that have a role in perpetuating racial inequities." Schools must adopt "a new educational paradigm" with antiracism and the cultivation of gender identities as its core mission. The state, fueled partly by national monies and partly by ideological commitment, is transforming education away from the American way of life and toward a future of mutual distrust and tyranny.

The triumph of CSJ is seen in developments throughout Maine's education system.

- OUT Maine and other education non-profits develop curriculum that MDOE promotes. Curricula from OUT Maine highlights the virtues of gender transitioning among kindergarteners.
- At least eight of Maine's largest ten school districts mark their commitment to CSJ ideology through diversity statements or committees.
- Many school districts hire equity consultants at the behest of MDOE and establishment education non-profits. Consultants recommend decolonizing the curriculum, establishing restorative discipline, and emotionally manipulating young children to achieve elusive equity.

Local school districts are crucial in determining the shape of education in their districts. Nevertheless, the resources and guidance offered by MDOE are heavily skewed toward CSJ curriculum, training, and norms. Education non-profits line up to offer the CSJ agenda in school operations. The MDOE elevates CSJ education non-profits as approved authorities on these matters. No real countervailing ideology is present in the system, so there is a continual ratcheting toward CSJ. This comes at the cost of our children and society as a result of being deprived of a true education.

Transparency measures should be adopted so parents know what is going on in Maine's schools. Parents' rights legislation would mark a good first step away from the system emphasizing CSJ and toward one emphasizing mastery, free thought, and truth. School choice measures would also help support parents' rights principles.

SECTION I:

THE CHALLENGE OF CRITICAL SOCIAL JUSTICE IN MAINE EDUCATION



WHAT IS CRITICAL SOCIAL JUSTICE?

Maine's K-12 schools have changed drastically over the past fifty years, just as they have across the nation. Teachers and administrators have adopted ideologies hostile to the American experience and values. These new ideologies come under a variety of names, but all of them are dedicated to promoting left-wing political activism and to rejecting the principles of American society. We call this new ideological bent Critical Social Justice (CSJ).

CSJ identifies a problem and proposes a solution. The supposed problem is that American society is made up of an intersection of oppressive structures. According to CSJ ideologues, America is racist, sexist, misogynist, intolerant, ableist, cisgendered, and homophobic. The privileged have built structures to keep the disadvantaged groups weak, unequal, and scattered. The education system is said to be one such structure.

CSJ adherents believe a new transformed K-12 education can solve this problem.¹ Instead of imparting truth to children or emphasizing skills or literacy, K-12 schools will teach oppressors to dismantle the oppressive structures and then to identify with the plight of the supposedly oppressed. Schools will cultivate feelings of shame among the supposed oppressors for their immutable characteristics so they become interested in dismantling the old structures. On the whole, the new education encourages conflict and change-oriented (or revolutionary) values at the expense of American society.² Activists promise a future in which the

formerly oppressed are liberated from these oppressive structures. Then all people will supposedly enjoy success regardless of their race, sexual orientation, or gender.

There are eight main vehicles for integrating CSJ into K-12 systems. All these vehicles first seek to be critical of or disrupt American culture and the family, and then to create a new culture dedicated to what they call social justice or liberation. Some vehicles try to shape the mindsets, beliefs, and behaviors of children. Some change disciplinary standards to celebrate what the old, supposedly oppressive culture had condemned. Some teach students to protest for leftist political causes. Others foster racial discrimination or sexualize curricula.

Advocates for CSJ sow confusion by using seemingly innocent terms like culturally responsive teaching, antiracism, implicit bias, and equity. Old words no longer mean what they used to mean, so citizens are manipulated into thinking that the new education system is the same as it has always been. These eight vehicles are policies and programs presented as remedies to the supposed problem of oppressive social structures in K-12 schools.

Culturally responsive teaching caters to stereotypes associated with identity groups.³ This teaching method denigrates those perpetuating the supposedly dominant culture and coerces students into modifying their behavior to suit supposedly marginalized cultures. Two key practices include rejecting

color-blindness and replacing instruction about facts with narrative stories.

Social-emotional learning cultivates certain attitudes, beliefs, opinions, and behaviors in children.⁴ It is important to distinguish between Standard and Transformative SEL. The core objective in Standard SEL programs is to fill the void created by secularism in public schools. Standard SEL replaces the Judeo-Christian understanding about morality and objective truth with a celebration of self and group norms, helping students feel better about themselves. Transformative SEL programs seek to displace and stigmatize the old, supposedly oppressive cultural, moral, and religious institutions central to a child's health and well-being, such as the nuclear family, meritocracy, and the church.⁵ In their place, it encourages children to embrace ideas such as gender fluidity, antiracism, toxic masculinity, white privilege, and the fundamentally unjust nature of American society. Education systems typically sell Standard SEL but deliver Transformative SEL.

Action civics displaces traditional, knowledge-based civics education with training students for activism and protest.⁶ The old civics teaches students about the character of American democracy or the history and traditions of our people. The new civics, by contrast, aims to raise up a new generation that believes good citizenship means fundamentally transforming America through activism. To achieve this, civics must be redefined as progressive political activism.

Equity is equality of group outcomes. In order to achieve equity, students must be treated differently based on their race, culture, and socioeconomic background. Resources and access to opportunities must be redistributed in schools based on favoritism, and equal

outcomes must be achieved despite loss of genuine academic advancement or learning attainment for individuals.

Restorative justice makes school discipline into a race issue.⁷ Disparities among races in school discipline are taken as evidence of systemic racism. Schools then must change disciplinary standards to ban out-of-school suspensions (OSS) for low-level conduct offenses (use of profanity, failure to follow classroom rules) or reduce OSS length for more serious infractions (violence, drug abuse).

Whole child or "student-centered" views of education see schools as a mechanism to socially engineer emotionally literate citizens by introducing activities that encourage children to reveal their emotional vulnerabilities to state employees.⁸ The traditional view of education is "teacher centric," where expert teachers impart knowledge to students and expect them to prove proficiency. Schools are expected to teach "the best that is thought and written" and promote character formation and basic critical thinking to preserve Western civilization.⁹ School districts that adopt a "whole child" or "student-centered" approach in their guiding frameworks implement SEL (see above) and trauma-informed programs (see below) rather than teaching basic academic disciplines.

Trauma-informed practices invite the state to assess the private psychological condition of children and intrude further into a child's life.¹⁰ This therapeutic education model is rooted in the concept of "safetyism," which makes emotional safety a virtue and creates a feedback loop wherein "kids become more fragile and less resilient, which signals to adults that they need more protection, which then makes them even more fragile and less resilient."¹¹

Queer theory asserts that all sexualities must be actively promoted and all taboos overcome.¹² It rejects traditional views about heterosexuality, sexual self-control, monogamy, marriage, and the family, and then endorses experimentation with homosexuality, bisexuality, transgenderism, transsexuality, and polyamory.¹³ Queer theory manifests in districts changing their policies regarding gender identity, parental notification, transgender students' use of bathrooms or locker rooms, and transforming the school libraries. Comprehensive sex education is no longer about health outcomes or pregnancy prevention. Instead, it centers on gender identity and sexual orientation at even the earliest ages.¹⁴

Each of these practices is objectionable on its own terms. Scholars have indeed developed significant secondary problems related to

their implementation and to their validity as enterprises. Restorative justice undermines school discipline, which in turn compromises teachers' ability to teach.¹⁵ Combined with a focus on equity, trauma-informed practices lead to overdiagnosing trauma and stigmatizing entire groups of children.¹⁶ We could go on, and many others have.

Nevertheless, the principal problem with these vehicles for CSJ is their connection with a false and pernicious vision of American society. CSJ in whatever form—even if it was not associated with these significant secondary problems—is bad for America and for Maine. CSJ ideology cannot organize a just society or deliver a workable education. Citizens and public officials must understand how this happened in Maine schools and who is to blame. Section II provides an answer to those pressing questions.

SECTION II:

SEXUALIZING EDUCATION AND SOWING DIVISION AMONG STUDENTS

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RECENT EPISODES OF CSJ IN MAINE: WHAT IS HAPPENING AND WHY?

Things that were unthinkable five or ten years ago now are everyday practices in public schools across America.¹⁷ A young girl is raped by a boy in Loudoun County, Virginia, but since the boy identifies as a girl the school administration covered it up. When the girl's father complained, he was arrested. Kindergarten teachers see it as their job to dismantle the idea that students can be boys or girls. Antiracist fervor has led schools to drop testing requirements and graduation standards in the name of equity.

Similar episodes are happening across Maine.

- A sixth grade classroom at Gorham Middle School filled with gender ideology posters reading "Gender is a social construct," "B is for Bisexual," and "T is for Transgender."¹⁸
- Third to fifth grade students in Hampden School District (RSU 22) "Civil Rights Club" told to draw pictures of nonbinary genders.¹⁹
- OUT Maine purchases nine hundred books with LGBTQ themes for school libraries across the state, working to fundraise to fulfill additional requests from schools.²⁰
- Kindergarteners in Regional School Unit 2 (Kennebec Intra-District Schools) given "sexual assault" training by an outside interest group, without parental consent.²¹
- A parent in MSAD #51 is banned from a daughter's graduation and called "vile" by a district superintendent for criticizing a letter in which the administration described their

community as having "a culture that continually reinforced white supremacy."²²

- Portland Public Schools pass a budget investing \$2.9 million in "equity" claiming that the budget "meets that moment" of "racial reckoning."²³
- A policy allowing students to use the bathroom and locker room of the opposite sex is "necessary to guide the district's actions moving forward," says the superintendent of Regional School Unit 4 (Wales).²⁴
- Public school teachers across Maine are given training in systems of oppression, intersectionality, and whiteness.²⁵
- A video developed under the MDOE's MOOSE program designed for preschool to second grade students says sometimes doctors "make a mistake" in designating gender when a baby is born.²⁶
- Posters at Hampden Academy School tell students "Broncos don't use someone's dead name because it is disrespectful to their identity."²⁷
- Scarborough student protest demands district staff support Black Lives Matter movement.²⁸

Public officials often treat such increasingly common stories as one-off episodes in rogue districts or the expressions of overly politicized teachers, or they ask citizens to believe that this doesn't happen in Maine.

Concerned citizens should know that these episodes are products of the system. No one can know what happens in every classroom and what portion of the day is dedicated to CSJ for each school and student. A great deal of variation exists among teachers, within districts, and across the state. An honest assessment is nevertheless possible. There is not an endless variety, after all. This report shows how Maine's public education system as a whole systematically produces education practices in line with CSJ using the eight vehicles discussed above. Politicians, like Governor Mills, push the CSJ agenda. The MDOE accepts national funding; her appointed officials use funds to guide local

school districts toward the establishment of CSJ policies and programs in schools; schools hire consultants to comply with direction from MDOE; and consultants recommend complete curriculum overhauls, more policy changes, and the hiring of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) officers to continue advancing the new trajectory of the school system. CSJ is deeply and systemically embedded into the DNA of Maine's K-12 public schools. Nothing substantial exists to counteract the direction of the CSJ-committed education system. We can see this most clearly in the sexualization of education and through the promotion of antiracist policies.

HOW MAINE'S SYSTEM SEXUALIZES EDUCATION

Why is a sixth grade classroom at Gorham Middle School filled with gender ideology posters reading “Gender is a social construct,” “B is for Bisexual,” and “T is for Transgender”?²⁹ Why is the MOOSE program promoting a video designed for preschool to second grade students that says sometimes doctors make mistakes in designating gender at birth?

These episodes are products of an education system that emphasizes the sexual nature of every student, from kindergarten to high school graduation and beyond. The policies are myriad, sometimes adopted at the behest of, or incentivized by, the national government. At other times they are enthusiastically supported by MDOE or designed with the consultation of major education non-profits interested in sexualizing children's education.

National and State Policies. National laws and regulations push Maine to pursue the sexualization of education. Maine accepts national money for pregnancy prevention programs, AIDS prevention, and SEL programs. By law, Maine schools must teach “medically accurate” sex education on abstinence, healthy relationships, contraception, family planning, sexually transmitted diseases, and conflict resolution sex education, but districts have some latitude in curricular decisions.³⁰ Under Maine law currently, schools need not instruct about sexual orientation or gender identity, or be culturally responsive, but MDOE encourages schools and local school boards to adopt curricula that include gender identity, sexual orientation, and culturally responsive

teaching.³¹ MDOE uses the cover of pregnancy prevention to teach sex education emphasizing gender identity and fluidity.

State regulations are crucial in creating an environment for sexualized education. MDOE helps facilitate the implementation of LGBTQ-affirming curriculum at all grade levels. It has partnered with Maine Family Planning, Puberty Happens, and OUT Maine to develop and disseminate such curricula. School districts following the direction of the MDOE and the legislature are encouraged to adopt policies allowing transgender students to use the bathroom or locker room of the opposite sex and requiring staff to use pronouns corresponding with a student's chosen gender identity (without the parent's consent).³²

Education Non-Profits. Education non-profits develop curriculum, organize clubs, identify allies, and provide teacher training throughout the state. **OUT Maine** is one of the primary left-wing education non-profits changing the trajectory of Maine's schools toward comprehensive K-12 sex education in gender identity. The group seeks “to create more welcoming and affirming communities for Maine's diverse queer youth in all of their intersectional identities.”³³ The group works to change the systems that serve Maine's youth by providing LGBTQ curriculum, programs, resources, and training. OUT Maine boasts about targeting the most rural schools to build programming and training.

The MDOE highlights the LGBTQ resources,

training, and programming to schools provided by OUT Maine.³⁴ The MDOE-OUT Maine partnership also yielded online lessons created by teachers for children in preschool through second grade. For instance, the MOOSE lesson module “Freedom Holidays” featured a video on LGBT+ activism glorifying transgender children such as Jazz Jennings and forcing children to watch the Blue’s Clues episode featuring a gay pride parade and a drag queen.³⁵ The entire module was supported by \$2.8 million in national funding.³⁶ Countless books about gender transitioning pepper Maine’s recommendations and appear in local school libraries courtesy of OUT Maine and its allies.

Activist groups also help to establish student clubs to further their sex education agenda. According to OUT Maine, there are more than 106 Gay Straight Trans Alliance (GSTA) clubs throughout Maine, including, by their own count, approximately 60 percent of public secondary schools.³⁷ OUT Maine supports GSTAs in more schools every year. These clubs provide students with LGBTQ resources that include Chest binders (specially designed breast compression garments) for young girls and contact information for gender transition clinics.³⁸ Such resources can be given to students ages 14 and older without parental knowledge or consent.

High schools, middle schools, and even elementary schools in Regional School Unit 22 (Hampden) have created Civil Rights Teams to rally LGBTQ student activists, for instance. The Hampden Academy Civil Rights Team started a “Broncos Don’t Say” campaign designed to police the speech of other students for lack of political correctness related to gender identity and expression.³⁹

Teacher and staff training reinforces these

efforts. Education non-profits develop this training and programming and offer it to school districts to bring these elements and techniques into the daily experience of the classroom. For example, OUT Maine has developed a school staff training on “LGBTQ youth cultural competency,” which explains the differences between sexual orientation and gender identity and expression.⁴⁰ Since 2015, OUT Maine claims to have trained over seven thousand providers around the state on how to increase LGBTQ programming in schools.⁴¹

School Libraries. OUT Maine started the “Read the Rainbow” campaign to purchase LGBTQ+ books for K-12 school libraries across Maine.⁴² More than nine hundred books have been funneled into school libraries so far. Library staff are given training in gender ideology. The Maine Association of School Libraries (MASL), for instance, held the symposium “Moving Forward Together” in 2022 featuring keynote speaker Maia Kobabe, author of *Gender Queer: A Memoire*.⁴³ The presence of such books in school libraries is not itself cause for concern. They should be available for students who may have an interest in reading them. It is, however, troubling when such books become required reading and cannot be avoided by students whose parents may find the material inappropriate for their child's grade level.

School Districts. All school districts implement some type of social-emotional learning (SEL) program that is usually paired with other therapeutic education models such as whole child practices or trauma-informed education, since these districts are pressured to do so through state policies. Most teachers are professionalized into the SEL view of sexuality. Contemporary transformative SEL programs seek to displace and stigmatize the old, supposedly oppressive cultural and moral

religious practices central to a child's health and well-being such as the nuclear family, monogamous love, sexual self-restraint, and preparation for parenthood. In their place, those embracing transformative SEL want children to embrace gender fluidity, the notion of toxic masculinity, and the idea that there are no significant psychological differences between boys and girls.

The Second Step program, which the MDOE pressures school districts to implement,⁴⁴ is a transformative SEL program promoted by the non-profit **Committee for Children**. The Committee for Children SEL Curriculum Second Step encourages students to question their sexual orientation and gender, be activists for issues such as for transgenderism and homosexuality, and use the website loveisrespect.org for sex advice. The website includes resources such as "5 tips for your first time [having sex]," and "dating in the closet." It provides information about places to get an abortion and promotes overcoming

sexual taboos such as polyamory. It is unclear how many school districts embrace these approaches.

Conclusion on Sexualization of Education.

Parents are unaware that sexual education of this nature occurs in their local district, and Maine has very little statewide data on the kinds of sexual education curricula or books in each school. Education non-profits, bent on transforming Maine's education system, have the data and boast about the success of their work. Nationally, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimate that about 47 percent of sixth through eighth grade students and 72 percent of ninth through twelfth grade students are taught about affirming sexual orientation in a required course. Fifty-one percent of sixth to eighth grade students and 73.3 percent of high schoolers are taught about gender identity or gender expression. And 54 percent of schools provide students with curricula or supplementary materials relevant to LGBTQ youth.⁴⁵

ANTIRACISM: HOW MAINE'S SYSTEM PROMOTES RACIAL SCAPEGOATING

Why would Portland Public Schools pass a budget investing \$2.9 million in “equity,” claiming that the budget “meets that moment” of “racial reckoning”?⁴⁶ How could public school teachers across Maine be given training in systems of oppression, intersectionality, and privilege?⁴⁷ How did students come to protest for political causes such as Black Lives Matter?

These episodes reflect the idea that America's educational system is systematically racist. The policies emphasizing the systematically racist character of the country are themselves systematically cultivated by the national government and by MDOE in conjunction with major education non-profits and foundations. Local districts adopt the system to varying degrees.

Antiracism without context simply means the removal of race from judgements of human action. However, CSJ adherents use the term to describe systems or societal institutions which they believe to be irrevocably infected with racist ideas, or have led to racially-disparate outcomes. The term antiracist is used to highlight policies which will lead to the deconstruction of those systems in order to make room for policies based on the idea of equity, or equality of results, versus equality of opportunity or equal justice under the law.

National and State Policies. National education standards and civil rights laws nudge states toward adopting CSJ standards on race. Generally, MDOE requires that school

districts adopt SEL in everything they do. It does this in several more particular ways through its standards. First, Maine's social studies standards emphasize instructing students to “take action.” The state standards for pre-K to twelfth grade include participating in “civic action or service learning” described as a “project based on a classroom, school, community or state, national or international asset or need and evaluate the project's effectiveness and civic contribution.”⁴⁸

Second, the MDOE recommends districts use antiracist groups to inform their social studies programs to point students toward such action. For example, the MDOE recommends **iCivics** as a social studies resource.⁴⁹ iCivics endorses action civics and antiracism.⁵⁰ Third, the MDOE has committed to “decolonizing current curricula.” MDOE pressures school districts and teachers to review their curriculum for “bias” and suggests that school syllabi should be reviewed through a “race-conscious lens” and altered to become culturally responsive to certain identity groups.

Transformative SEL makes its way into race-conscious teacher training regulations. The MDOE recommends using the Teaching Tolerance Anti-Bias Framework to reevaluate school standards on identity, diversity, justice, and action.⁵¹ The standards include training students to adopt group identities, to recognize the “dominant culture,” systems of power and privilege, and to become activists for social justice causes.⁵²

Education Non-Profits. Districts need to respond to state “suggestions,” but they need help to accomplish the “recommendations.” Many schools and districts turn to interest group partners to supply curriculum, equity audits, and teacher training. If the curriculum needs to be decolonized, experts in decolonization must be found. If equity is to be achieved, equity experts will be needed. Maine has built it, and the education non-profits have come.

Some groups emphasize action. Portland Public Schools partners with local non-profits which provide grants for students to participate in service learning projects. The intention behind even mundane service learning activities is to get students used to organizing and protesting. They begin by making wood paddles to sell to raise money for Camp Sunshine, but projects are advanced to support social justice causes.⁵³

Districts provide extra resources to guide teacher training. For example, MDOE directs districts to use **Newsela** materials to implement training on “Culturally Responsive Pedagogy in the Classroom—Activating Critical Consciousness with Current Events.”⁵⁴ The training begins with implicit bias training and a treatment of CSJ and it concludes by giving teachers access to a host of culturally responsive and critical conscious Newsela classroom resources. School districts can use national funds to purchase Newsela content.⁵⁵ In addition, the **Maine Education Association**, the state’s largest teachers union, trains thousands of educators each year in training bearing titles such as “Race, Equity and Social Justice,” “Understanding Implicit Bias and Equity,” and “Creating Equitable Systems for All Students.”⁵⁶ The Bangor School district contracted with the **Racial Equity And Justice Center** to lead their antiracist

teacher training.⁵⁷ The Penobscot River Educational Partnership hosted a professional development day for approximately 1,400 educators featuring keynote speaker Dr. Greta Peay of **Diversity Matters LLC**, which offers training in cultural responsiveness, equity, diversity, and inclusion.⁵⁸ Examples could be multiplied. The diversity-industrial complex plays a decisive role in helping school districts meet state standards and regulations.

School Libraries. The Maine Library Association (MLA) believes libraries play a “critical role in confronting racism and creating equity.”⁵⁹ The MLA is committed to amplifying the “voices” of identity groups. To achieve this, the MLA encourages school and public libraries to audit their collections, include more antiracist children’s books, change hiring practices, and develop community outreach campaigns.⁶⁰ Even the MLA’s Intellectual Freedom Advocacy Group has been subverted to the goals of “social justice, equity and anti-racism.”⁶¹

Conclusion on Antiracism. No good data exists on how much student activism is achieved. But the tendency is toward more as Maine students mobilize in protest for more leftist political causes every year. In 2019 thousands of Maine high school students participated in the Global Climate Strike.⁶² In 2020 a group of Maine students demanded that their school district support Black Lives Matter.⁶³ In 2022, middle school students in Portland organized a class walkout, claiming “they’ve experienced or witnessed racism, anti-gay and anti-transgender rhetoric from classmates and that teachers failed to intervene.”⁶⁴ A comprehensive study of restorative justice programs at the school district level is needed.

SECTION III:

WHO PROMOTES
CSJ IN MAINE
SCHOOLS?



WHO PROMOTES CSJ IN OUR SCHOOLS?

The previous section provided a glimpse of the system that produces CSJ educational practices. National laws, national monies, state regulations, state laws, department of education mandates, education non-profits, school districts, teachers unions, and other actors all provide key pieces to the puzzle. They produce a system. They are the system. And CSJ in all its varieties is among the most important actors in the system. It may be helpful to look at this system in a different way. The previous section shows elements of the policy apparatus that make up the system and yield certain outcomes. This section looks at the actors themselves and tries to give a more comprehensive account of what each of the actors actually does. The previous section mentioned national laws or state regulations on particular points, for instance. This section will treat national laws or state regulations more comprehensively on their own terms, so that political responsibility for this system can be better identified. We identify the most important players in promoting CSJ within Maine.

1. THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

The federal government provides education funds to states annually. Generally, strings are attached to these funds: states must either spend some of the funds on nationally-mandated activity; states must accept a regulatory burden; or states must match national spending on a national priority.

These strings direct programs and priorities in Maine's education system. Since 1994, the national government has been directing Maine's education system toward the new progressive view of CSJ education. According to the MDOE, 15.3 percent of total statewide spending, or \$2,759.58 per pupil, comes from national grants.⁶⁵ These funds either come through the state or go directly to a school. What flows are the strings whereby the US government shapes Maine's education system.

National String 1: The first national string came in 1994 from President Bill Clinton Administration's Goals 2000: Educate America Act. States adopted national education goals to receive national funding through the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). Goals 2000 was sold as an effort to prepare all children to be "ready to learn" when they start school. Instead, education officials in the national government stipulated that schools should focus on instilling the supposedly correct attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs in students—social-emotional learning (SEL). This is explicit in Goal 8: "By the year 2000, every school will promote partnerships that will increase parental involvement and participation in promoting the social, emotional, and academic growth of children." Goal 8 saw parents as mere "partners" with the government in directing their child's education and care.

National String 2: The second string came in 2011 through the Common Core State Standards Initiative, which produced K-12

standards adopted by Maine in an effort to qualify for increased funding. While most complaints about Common Core standards at the time pointed to the development of a national curriculum, the content of the curriculum reflected a decisive move toward the psychological manipulation of children through SEL.

Common Core incentivizes the collection of “student-level data” that tracks social, emotional, and intellectual development. The national government developed a National Education Data Model whereby states would track personal information about students and parents including their specific religious affiliation, their test scores, and their bus routes. The national government pays states or non-profits to create their own databases, make them compatible with one another, and then asks that national agencies have access to the databases. The education non-profits contracted to develop these databases promise to deliver a “centralized Interactive Data tool and reporting platform/system that will work in tandem with current state longitudinal data systems.”⁶⁶

National String 3: The third string came in 2015 from the Department of Health and Human Services' sex education grant programs known as the Personal Responsibility Education Program (PREP) and the Division of Adolescent and School Health (DASH). These programs promote comprehensive sex education emphasizing gender identity under the guise of “prevention” programs.

National String 4: The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) marks an expansion of efforts to expand CSJ through national standards. Common Core standards are more general and open to a variety of interpretations, perhaps, while ESSA

standards lock states in to the national government's commitment to CSJ ideology and techniques. The demands of the national standards are both more narrow and more stringent. Put another way, critics of Common Core may sometimes have sounded paranoid about how leftist the national standards were, but ESSA shows that such seeming paranoia was justified. ESSA comes with 162 pages of statutory requirements with which states must align in order to get the considerable funds.⁶⁷

First, ESSA requires that states receiving national funds for early childhood education must adopt Head Start performance standards. Head Start standards are infused with SEL, teaching children empathy, emotional self-awareness, an understanding and appreciation of diverse family structures, environmental responsibility, the beauty of recycling, and so on. Education non-profits like the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) arise to help flesh out these Head Start standards, nearly all of which relate to the diagnostic of CSJ. NAEYC molds children's mindsets to recognize “the biases in larger society, such as racism or sexism,” and to celebrate the liberation from those structures. This pre-K curriculum is then adapted to the post-K world under ESSA.

Second, ESSA adopts many SEL initiatives. Title I funds counseling, mentoring, and schoolwide, “tiered” support; Title II funds training school personnel in “learning readiness” and “when and how to refer... children with, or at risk of, mental illness”; Title IV provides monies for mental health, relationship building, and “21st Century Community Learning Centers.” It puts forward new metrics for judging the success of schools, including the level of student engagement and activism as well as the school climate and feelings of safety.⁶⁸

Lastly, ESSA expands the “student-level data” collection from Common Core to include SEL components such as “academic behaviors” and “being open to and accepting of others,” “not letting feelings get in the way of schoolwork,” and “volunteering to work on additional activities or projects.” Self-management and self-awareness are now tested and included in longitudinal data collected through Habits of Mind.⁶⁹ States usually work with Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) to develop systems to measure SEL factors in their students—and then develop systems and policies to further such social and emotional outcomes.⁷⁰ Teachers are the data collectors, playing the role of psychologists collecting data without parental consent, even though teachers lack the training of psychologists. If psychologists were to collect data like this without parental consent, they would lose their licenses, but Maine allows teachers to conduct such monitoring and reporting. Maine has partnered with CASEL to adopt a measurement system and a curriculum to promote transformative social and emotional learning according to these national incentives. Maine’s SEL4ME platform embodies all aspects of this data collection, including the manipulative measurements, the continual tracking, and the hope to put this new ethic at the center of education. The transformative nature of SEL4ME’s ambitions is seen in its LGBTQ+ and Gender Expansive Resources, in its school climate surveys,⁷¹ and where MDOE provides resources for students and teachers to transform their lives.⁷²

National String 5: The fifth string came in 2021 from the Biden administration’s American Rescue Plan Elementary and Secondary School relief funds. The plan provides \$122 billion to states to support

school reopening and operations and emphasizes using funds to meet students’ social and emotional needs. This was accomplished through the ARP’s ESSER (Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief) grant program. States had a wide latitude in filling out their ESSER grant applications.

Maine on a String. The acceptance of national funds is a political decision. To get the money, a state agrees to do a certain thing. Consider the following:

State of Maine Accepts String 3 on Sex Education. In 2015, the Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention accepted \$246,390 which it subgranted to Maine Family Planning and Jobs for Maine Graduates. In 2017, the center accepted an additional \$250,000 of PREP funds. **Maine Family Planning** provides training and materials to **Jobs for Maine Graduates**, which provides sexuality programming to juniors and seniors in high schools across Maine. The group uses All4You! And All4You2! curricula, which use lectures, role-plays, videos, and service learning visits to teach adolescents about sex.⁷³ Maine’s Department of Health and Human Services accepted another \$250,000 in PREP grants for the October 2020 to September 2023 budget period. Additionally, the MDOE accepted \$67,500 in DASH funds. Maine used these DASH funds for state, territorial, and local education agencies as well as state health agencies to establish and strengthen systemic procedures to collect and report Youth Risk Behavior Survey and School Health Profiles data for policy and program improvements.

State of Maine Accepts String 5 ESSER Funds. More than \$400 million in ESSER funds flowed into Maine under Governor Mills,

and a significant portion went to radicalize the education experience along SEL lines.⁷⁴ It used money to establish the Task Force on Childhood Trauma, which incorporates SEL into educational practices. What this means is that school days can begin with examples of bullying in the context of power and privilege, gender-norming or some other trauma so that teachers can gauge and shape the reaction of children to these events. SEL also shapes the programs around counseling. The MOOSE program for online resources was funded through ESSER and turned to focus on “the marginalized individuals who identify as LGBTQ+.” Generally, Maine’s ESSER grant uses the cover of school reopening to fund an SEL revolution in Maine education.⁷⁵

2. MAINE'S CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Governors in Maine have authority not only to propose bills but to organize executive agencies, appoint people to the state board of education, and to name the commissioner of education. Governor Mills has used these powers to promote the sexualization of education, the promotion of SEL, radicalism, and long-term data collection on the emotional state of children as judged by educators. All goals are accomplished in the name of sweet-sounding policies that hide the true nature of what is going on. How has Governor Mills done this?

Reintroduction of the Children’s Cabinet.

Under Governor Mills’s leadership, the Children’s Cabinet has disseminated “a universally accessible and free Social and Emotional Learning Curriculum for all schools & after school programs,” funded restorative justices programs and aligned them with other state programs for youth, and increased the surveillance of students

through “behavioral health screenings” and tracking.⁷⁶ The cabinet plans to expand all of these programs in the long-term if Governor Mills wins reelection, including using “high-quality preventive services for young children.”⁷⁷ Many nefarious policies are adopted under the mantle of “prevention.” Child abuse prevention means undermining parental rights. AIDS prevention means early childhood sexual education. Careful monitoring to prevent political extremism can mean trying to undermine conservatism. The Children’s Cabinet undermines parental authority by transferring authority to schools and loosening standards for behavior under restorative justice programs.

Extended Educational Tracking. Accepting national funds under the ESSA encourages states to adopt student-level data on each student’s psychological, emotional, social, and academic learning, as interpreted by teachers. Governor Mills has enthusiastically endorsed these elements through her Children’s Cabinet, always under the disguise of abuse prevention or suicide prevention. Not only are teachers ill-suited to judge such emotional problems in their students, but the secret mining of data is wrong in principle as it collects data on students without parents’ consent and with the threat that it might be used or misused in the future. These practices have been part and parcel of Maine’s practices since Common Core, but they have accelerated since ESSA was passed in 2016.

Sexualization of Education. Governor Mills signed laws mandating comprehensive sex education and outlawing all but gender-affirming counseling for students. Under her commissioner, MDOE has handed the keys to education training and curriculum development to radical groups. It has adopted

a comprehensive pre-K–12 sex education plan, including gender identity affirmation and teaching consent to kindergarteners, for instance. (See below under Education Non-Profits.)

3. MAINE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

The national strings put limits on how states can govern themselves. All states must adopt variants of CSJ in their practices, curriculum, and teacher training. But states accomplish these goals with greater or lesser enthusiasm. MDOE is particularly enthusiastic when it comes to adopting sex-affirming, gender identity curriculum at the state level. Its commitment to racial justice is also remarkable, though not as radical as California's or Colorado's.

Sexualization of Education. States can adopt quite a wide variety of policies when it comes to sexualizing education. In Idaho, for instance, there is no dedicated state website to sex education. Maine, however, does have such a website.⁷⁸ In Maine, the sexual education curriculum, both recommended and required, extends from pre-K through high school graduation.

Maine's official K–12 health education standards include basic instruction on nutrition, safety and injury prevention, physical activity, healthy relationships, and substance abuse.⁷⁹ These standards would lead parents to allow their children to attend such sex education classes. However, nothing in the standards prevents sexuality courses (and reading courses) from including gender ideology in curricula or schools from partnering with left-wing education non-profits to implement a sexuality program. This enables the MDOE to undermine the state's official

standards to push its own agenda.

The radicalism of MDOE's is breathtaking. Consider just a few elements. First, it has adopted "climate surveys" to track and monitor the student's commitments to diversity, equity, and inclusion. Second, to indoctrinate students in this direction, MDOE promotes transformative SEL. It recommends OUT Maine Inclusive Curriculum Kits Grade K–12.⁸⁰ The kits include trans-affirming classroom lessons, pronoun pins, pride and ally pins, LGBT books like *I Am Jazz*, and bracelets for student alliance members.⁸¹ Third, it recommends sex education and gender identity curriculum like MDOE LGBTQ+ Studies, SEL4ME, Comprehensive Threat Assessment, Genderbread Person, OUT Maine, MaineTransNet, and MIYHS (ME Integrated Youth Health Survey).⁸² Its recommended health curriculum focuses not on obesity or healthy exercise, but on "LGBTQ+ inclusive, age-appropriate, medically accurate, and non-stigmatizing" curriculum from a variety of education non-profits. It also recommends that teachers override parents' wishes regarding gender identity, embraces the ideas of biological men playing women's sports and of allowing biological men to use women's bathrooms. This is what is meant by "creating a supporting administrative system."

Governor Mills's MDOE pressures parents to affirm their child's chosen gender identity and to transition.⁸³ As a "mental health" resource, the MDOE recommends that children use the Trevor Project, which provides gender and sexuality instruction, including masturbation, asexuality, and transgenderism.

MDOE has created a strategic plan to sexualize schools in partnership with OUT Maine.⁸⁴ The "Building Welcoming and Affirmative communities for Maine's LGBTQ+

Youth”⁸⁵ plan creates a rural-community focused model that targets children, their families, and community and support systems in several ways. First, OUT Maine will host weekly programs, overnights, weekend leadership retreats, and statewide events like the “Rainbow Ball Weekend” to garner the attention of more children. Second, OUT Maine will change the school climate by implementing training and creating more GSTA clubs. The group intends to weave a net of trained community members, including mental health providers, clergy, schools, and community youth-serving organizations. The completed OUT Maine draft curriculum recommends books on gender transitioning to kindergartners and books celebrating family diversity and polyamory in kindergarten through second grade.

School Climate. Climate surveys are seemingly innocent innovations that have radical implications. As MDOE implements them, climate surveys ask students a battery of questions about their feelings concerning their learning environment, about the quality of their relationships, or about their emotional safety or their motivation for study. (Then answers are kept as student-level data over the course of time). But students take this survey after years of SEL, culturally responsive teaching, comprehensive sex education, and gender identity instruction that teaches them to be ill at ease within oppressive structures. Climate surveys end up validating the claims that the education system is oppressive. This measurement tool is then used to justify even more policies to “fix” the problems “found” in the climate survey. Students who find no problems in their climate are failing to adjust to Maine’s new education system. Students who do find problems are exactly what the education system itself hopes to find. Climate surveys are arguably promoted by the national

law ESSA,⁸⁶ but seem not to be funded by ESSA.

Antiracism. MDOE, along with the Maine School Boards Association, the Maine School Superintendents Association, Maine Administrators of Services for Children with Disabilities, the Maine Education Association, the Maine Principals’ Association, and the Maine Curriculum Leaders Association declared their commitment and support for diversity, equity, and inclusion in Maine schools with the following statement in 2020:

*We proudly and steadfastly support the educators and districts in Maine who are taking on the work of understanding and dismantling racism and inequity in our schools and communities. We urge all Maine schools and educators to accept their role and responsibilities in examining and addressing the inequities that have long existed in our society and institutions.*⁸⁷

This statement marked a culmination of sorts for the MDOE and set a path forward for regulations, policies, partnerships, and events. MDOE promised to dismantle education in order to rebuild it along antiracist grounds. Education, according to MDOE, “is one of the many systems that have a role in perpetuating racial inequities.” Schools must adopt “a new educational paradigm” with antiracism at its heart. Even academic programming must become culturally responsive and emphasize social and emotional learning.⁸⁸

The MDOE and allied groups called it their “role and duty” to “actively partner with all schools in constructing a new educational paradigm.” They called for schools to establish social emotional learning as a prerequisite to academic learning, emphasizing equity in education, ongoing teacher and administrator training programs, and ensuring “all academic

and non-academic programming is culturally responsive.” The letter stated that many school districts were undertaking this work in different ways, including engaging in equity audits, expecting all school and personnel to undergo antiracism and culturally responsive training, adopting antiracist instruction practices, and decolonizing curricula. The MDOE supported its commitment to CSJ by providing antibias resources to schools. The resources included instructional materials in various content areas, how to conduct curriculum reviews, a “diverse” book finder, and materials for teacher training and staff “reflections.” It recommends the “Teaching Tolerance” curriculum called “Speaking Up Against Racism Around the Coronavirus” and other curricula.⁸⁹

4. THE ATTORNEY GENERAL

The Attorney General administers the Civil Rights Team project, which has been working with K–12 schools in Maine for twenty-five years.⁹⁰ There are currently 207 participating schools with Civil Rights Teams. Teachers and administrators recruit students to join the teams and then lead them. These clubs exist to “reduc[e] bias-motivated behaviors and harassment in schools.” This has manifested itself in the student groups policing student speech and behavior. For instance, the Hampden Academy Civil Rights Team started a “Broncos Don’t Say” campaign with posters created by the Team that read, “Broncos don’t use someone’s dead name because it is disrespectful to their identity.”⁹¹ Civil Rights Teams campaigns alter school climates by pressuring teachers and students to affirm gender identities and sexual orientations and to become hyper aware of race. Through these clubs, students are taught to affirm ideas like gender identity at the earliest ages. At least

nineteen elementary schools across Maine have established Civil Rights Teams. Any school can start a team beginning in third grade.

5. THE LEGISLATURE

Maine’s legislature has been involved in funding the education establishment and in supporting some CSJ initiatives in the area of comprehensive sex education over the past several years. The groundwork for these policies was laid in 2005 when the state’s antidiscrimination law was expanded to include sexual orientation and gender identity. This policy, as it has been interpreted, requires that students be allowed to participate in athletic events and use locker rooms, toilets, and shower facilities based on their gender identity rather than their biological sex.⁹² This policy has led to the Maine Principals’ Association, which regulates athletics, adopting the standard that students will participate in sports in accordance with their gender identity.⁹³

In 2015, the legislature passed LD 1180 requiring child sexual abuse prevention education for public preschool programs and for all students enrolled in kindergarten to fifth grade.⁹⁴ While this sounds innocuous, sexual abuse prevention ends up bringing with it some radical changes in how early sex is talked about and what is said. Young students are, under such laws, taught about rape, affirmative consent, and introduced to sex affirmative teachings. All this takes place under the cover of “prevention.”

Things took off in 2019 at the beginning of Governor Mills’s term. Maine legislators banned conversion therapy for minors in 2019.⁹⁵ The legislation gave schools grounds for discipline of a school psychologist or guidance counselor who did anything other

than affirm a student's new sexual orientation or gender identity. The legislature also passed LD 773, which required comprehensive sex education to include instruction about affirmative consent, communication, and decision-making regarding sexual activity.⁹⁶ This directive was a significant move toward increasing Maine's sex education requirements. Although some schools included instruction in these areas for a number of years, many teachers view the new statute as the implementation of uniform sexuality instruction in all schools statewide.⁹⁷

Education non-profits such as the Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS) decry the fact that Maine's curriculum is not required under law to include instruction about sexual orientation or gender identity and is not required to be culturally responsive. The MDOE is responsible for directing local school boards to establish these further curriculum requirements. LD 773 in the hands of Governor Mills's DOE does all it can to push more and earlier sex education. Mandates are sure to follow, even though many districts seem to think that such mandates are already here.

6. LOCAL SCHOOL DISTRICTS

Maine has 185 school districts, and the state still has a strong bent in favor of local control. So seriously does Maine take local control that there is no centralized data on how many school districts have adopted the OUT Maine curriculum or have adopted transformative SEL. But the state is not powerless. MDOE can badger and threaten local school districts to adopt certain kinds of curriculum, but it rarely cuts off funding if local school districts balk at these efforts. Nevertheless,

local school districts turn to the MDOE for resources and to the educational non-profits that the MDOE recommends. Curricular and training options are heavily skewed by, if not exclusively drawn from, groups pushing CSJ agendas. Precisely how many school districts follow MDOE's specific instructions depends on the particular nature of the instruction as well as the school district. According to an article in a newspaper citing a paper written by a University of Maine graduate student and the Equality Maine interest group, about a quarter of Maine's school districts have adopted LGBTQ+ friendly curricula.⁹⁸

Local control means each school district can pick their own equity consultants. Equity consultants help solve a problem for school districts and state departments of education. The federal government mandates state testing. Gaps between students of different races emerge from the testing. States and school districts are required to help narrow and eliminate these gaps. The MDOE has mandated equity audits, which equity consultants can help complete. Equity consultants can help make it appear like districts are doing something about the problem.

Three main equity consultants operate within Maine's education system. These include Maine Intercultural Communication Consultants, Mid-Atlantic Equity Consortium, Inc., and Panorama Education, Inc.

At a minimum, under such consultants, training is given to teachers and administrators on privilege, gender ideology, cultural responsiveness, and implicit bias. A more involved equity consultant will conduct small group debriefs to determine whether a group has an antiracist and "inclusive" mindset. For example, the largest equity consultant we

could find, Mid-Atlantic Equity Consortium, Inc. was paid approximately \$110,000 for thirty-seven days of work in Regional School Unit 5 (Freeport) to complete an equity audit, analyze disproportionality in school discipline, and engage in training and practices to create equity. The group provided twelve days of focus group sessions and seven days of training with the goal of waking the community up to systemic issues. Another sixteen days were spent providing recommendations to close equity gaps. Equity training and development of equity policy took an additional fifteen days each. Equity consultants generally recommend complete curriculum overhauls, more policy changes, and hiring of DEI officers to continue advancing the new trajectory of the school system. An analysis of just a few districts in Maine reveals that education departments have spent hundreds of thousands of tax dollars on these consultants (See Appendix A).

Big districts may have an entire foundation, such as the Portland Public Schools Promise, dedicated to advancing equity. This foundation claims to be “vigilant” in “rooting out systemic or ongoing inequity.”⁹⁹ The foundation launched a new community campaign called “Addressing the Opportunity Gap” to raise money for systemic equity work in Portland Public Schools. The group’s strategic plan includes work to “decolonize the curriculum,” more training for staff members, and the creation of a mentorship program exclusively available to students who are Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC).¹⁰⁰

Even small school districts in Maine have well-developed strategic Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) plans. Consider the example of Five Town Community School District, which has an average daily attendance of approximately 655 students, and has taken a “deliberate antiracist stand.” The district

is now transforming its policies, curriculum, and environment to fulfill this new mission. Beginning in the summer of 2020, district staff, administration, and the board were required to read *White Fragility* by Robin DiAngelo to “gain a better understanding of systemic racism and white privilege.” It established a DEI task force to “dismantle” the supposed systemic racism in the district.

By 2021, the district had a CSJ training plan for teachers, and it had hired a firm to conduct an equity audit.¹⁰¹ The audit included a student survey wherein sixth to twelfth grade students were asked the following questions: “What is your gender identity?” “Which of these best describes your current sexual orientation? Asexual, Bisexual, Gay/Lesbian, Heterosexual, Pansexual, A sexual orientation not listed.”¹⁰² The audit recommended the creation of a strategic plan that would make three key action items accompanied by clear objectives. First, the district should expand its DEI training series, “Anti-Racism for Educators.” The training should equip teachers and staff to “effectively disrupt and address any speech or behavior that is harmful.” Second, the district should embed an equity framework within its plans to make sure all directives are guided by equity. Third, the plan should establish a formal review process to ensure practices, procedures, and policies are continually evaluated to become more equitable. These recommendations from the audit are incorporated into Five Town’s new strategic plan for 2023 to 2027.

As a result, schools in the Five Town Community District must change staff training, curriculum, and school culture. For instance, Camden Rockport Elementary School now teaches Kindergarten through fourth grade with the Second Step SEL curriculum.¹⁰³ Its teachers must adopt culturally responsive

classroom methods. The school library has analyzed its book collection and is adding to the collection to increase the diversity of its books. The school has developed a robust data system to collect personal and intimate information on students' social-emotional development.

School districts are key players in pushing or not pushing CSJ. To give an idea about how Maine's school districts are handling state recommendations, one would need to study each district in much greater depth. It would be important, for instance, to know whether school districts accept Maine's state standards, policies, and goals. Mt. Ararat High School and the towns of Topsham, Bowdoin, Bowdoinham, and Harpswell, for instance, adopt "Maine's system of standards for student learning" and agree to promote and provide "assessment of student learning, accountability and equity."¹⁰⁴ Each district has a different sex education curriculum, SEL approach, combination of clubs, teacher training, and so on. We focus on some easily available measures of CSJ commitment—namely, whether districts have Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) committees, whether they have completed an equity audit or placed DEI in their strategic plan, and whether they have DEI statements. Such DEI commitments show that a district is putting resources and talent behind the cause of CSJ. Committees usually are concerned to infuse the curriculum and personnel with CSJ policies. Statements show a commitment at the administrative level, just as an equity audit or placing CSJ into the strategic plan does.

In Maine's largest ten school districts, four have DEI committees; seven have done an equity audit that could be discovered through the district website or have included DEI in their strategic plan; and four have a DEI

statement. Only Buxton and Berwick have done none of these three DEI actions. A sampling of middle-sized school district finds fewer, but still substantial, DEI commitments. Of these middle-sized districts, four have DEI committees; three have done an equity audit that could be discovered through the district website or have included DEI in their strategic plan; and two have a DEI statement. Four of these middle-sized districts have no DEI presence in their plans. The five small school districts we surveyed have a greater DEI commitment than the middle-sized districts. Two of the five districts have DEI committees, an equity audit or a strategic plan for DEI, and a DEI statement. One district has none of these DEI commitments, while two others have a mixture of two such DEI commitments. (See the accompanying chart on Page 25.)

LARGE SCHOOL DISTRICTS (MORE THAN 2000 AVERAGE DAILY ATTENDANCE)	DEI COMMITTEE?	EQUITY AUDIT OR DEI IN STRATEGIC PLAN	DEI STATEMENT
Portland Public Schools	Yes	Yes	Yes
Lewiston Public Schools	No	No	Yes
Bangor Public Schools	Yes	Yes	Yes
Regional School Unit 6 (Buxton)	No	No	No
Auburn Public Schools	No	Yes	No
Maine School Administrative District 17 (Oxford Hills)	No	Yes	No
Sanford Public Schools	No	No	Yes
Windham Raymond School District (RSU 14)	No	Yes	No
Regional School Unit 60 (Berwick)	No	No	No
Scarborough Public Schools	Yes	Yes	No
Regional School Unit 22 (Hampden)	Yes	Yes	No
MEDIUM-SIZED DISTRICTS (BETWEEN 1000 AND 2000 ADA)			
Saco Public Schools	Yes	No	No
Maine School Administrative District 15	No	No	Yes
Regional School Unit 79 (Presque Isle)	No	No	No
Regional School Unit 3 (Unity)	No	Yes	No
Regional School Unit 40 (Union)	No	No	No
Waterville Public Schools	Yes	No	No
Wells-Ogunquit CSD	No	No	No
York Public Schools	Yes	Yes	Yes
Regional School Unit 61 (Bridgton)	No	No	No
Regional School Unit 52 (Turner)	No	No	No
Regional School Unit 5 (Freeport)	Yes	Yes	No
SMALL SCHOOL DISTRICTS (LESS THAN 1000 ADA)			
Mt. Desert CSD	No	No	Yes
Regional School Unit 5 (Dixfield)	Yes	No	Yes
Five Town CSD	Yes	Yes	Yes
Regional School Unit 26 (Orono)	Yes	Yes	Yes
Regional School Unit 12 (Somerville)	No	No	No

7. EDUCATION NON-PROFITS

Education non-profits like OUT Maine and equity consultants from around the country rise to provide the curriculum, training, and support for what Maine's new standards demand. Frequently, these education non-profits, like "Teaching Tolerance," are national—giving Maine what they give other states. Frequently, they are specific to Maine.

It can be difficult to know where the MDOE ends and the education non-profits begin. Education non-profits have a symbiotic relationship with both national mandates or national standards and the MDOE's translation of those national standards. National standards tied to money mean that states and school districts must meet those standards, or at least try to meet them. Teachers, department chairs, and school principals have to comply with specific directives. Education non-profits, curriculum providers, and teacher training experts arise to meet this challenge. Schools need to add antiracism to their curriculum to meet a Common Core directive for third graders. The Southern Poverty Law Center's (SPLC) "Learning for Justice" curriculum has a prepackaged plan to help time-strapped teachers achieve it.¹⁰⁵ If MDOE demands equity audits, then a slew of equity consultants will descend on Maine's school districts to provide them. If MDOE has comprehensive sex education learning outcomes, then OUT Maine or some other group will provide the curriculum and teacher training, and help mentors develop ally clubs on school campuses.

Nobody can exactly say which comes first. The regulations create the need for the education

non-profits, but the education non-profits lobby the regulators for such regulations. They form what might be called an iron triangle between the regulator (MDOE), the interest group, and the schools themselves. Dozens of education non-profits dedicated to single issues operate within the Maine educational space, nearly all of which are from the activist political Left.

More subtle forces are in play, including the Maine School Management Association, the Maine Education Association, the Maine School Board Association, and the Maine School Superintendent Association. The Maine School Management Association, an umbrella group for school boards and superintendents, plays a key role in training school managers. It established the Cultural Competence Institute for Maine Educators; this consists of eight workshops, all of which promote the CSJ analysis. Sessions included Creating a Culture of Inclusion, DEI Mentorship, Developing a Sustainable Practice for DEI: Schools and Districts, and much more.¹⁰⁶ Representatives from these groups not only clamor for more and more funds, but they also do so for acts requiring diversity, equity, and inclusion training or implicit bias training for school employees.¹⁰⁷

Most crucially, it is through the system of honors and dishonors that these groups get local school boards and superintendents to adopt the policies that the MDOE implements. These groups professionalize school board members and get involved in selecting school superintendents by recruiting and vetting candidates.

WHY CSJ IN K-12 EDUCATION IS BAD FOR MAINE

CSJ undermines key American notions like color-blindness, meritocracy, and republican self-government. Critical theorists think that oppressive structures linger underneath our seemingly liberal framework. They therefore promote color-conscious and sex-conscious policies to students. Those from so-called oppressor groups who achieve great things are stigmatized for having done them by unearned privilege to the detriment of student ambition and drive. And they encourage the transfer of government authority from representative institutions to government bureaucracies. Representative institutions are, after all, reflections of the people themselves. In the minds of CSJ adherents; only antiracist experts, for instance, can be trusted to examine the curriculum or to institute teacher training so the public does not overly taint the results.

CSJ sows social turmoil and antipathy. Most CSJ ideologies teach that the oppressive structures and hostile attitudes of one group for another are sown into the nature of human life. If they cannot be overcome, there is no way out of the treadmill of oppression: it is only a question of who is on top. The pluralist concepts of color-blindness and merit have in reality tamed tribal tendencies in human nature, but CSJ ideologues dismiss these ideas out of hand.

CSJ undermines attachment to our nation. Teaching that America is inherently racist or systemically racist is wrong. No good results

can proceed from such a lie. America is a land of hope and a land of promise. Undermining attachment to the country, based on lies or half-truths, will undermine the country in the long term.

CSJ undermines America's competitive advantage in education. The traditional view of education sees a school's mission as imparting objective, academic knowledge and skills to students. The CSJ view of education uses schools to teach children how knowledge is subjectively built on power and privilege. Traditional education values individual merit while CSJ stigmatizes achievement and rejects individuality in favor of group identities. Traditional education seeks to cultivate students' minds for their own sake while the CSJ view of education trains students to become activists for their chosen political cause.

CSJ undermines concepts of the family. Traditional education views character formation as only a supporting role complementing the work of families, religion, culture, and other institutions and relationships in American life. CSJ education intrudes into family life by limiting the power of parents. Traditional education respects parental rights to decide where and how their child should learn, but school districts taken by CSJ believe parents have no right to dictate what schools teach their children. The ideology strips away the delineation between private and public life in schools.

CSJ is a recipe for further extensions of state power. Under a school system taken by CSJ

education, the state alone determines what children learn to be good, true, or beautiful. These decisions are taken from parents and given to the state through the public school system. Practices such as the commitment to labeling certain groups as oppressive or the sexualization of education are intentional. It seems clear that CSJ adherents view childhood innocence and family stabilizations as roadblocks to revolution. The shaming of children based on their immutable characteristics will lead to a culture of victimization, resentment, and group rights antithetical to freedom of speech and equal treatment under the law. This exploitation

cultivates anger, resentment, division, and hatred in children. The next generation will grow up to be radical adults resentful of their parents' norms and religious values, and ripe for the political change CSJ proponents seek.

Public officials must reinstate the unalienable authority of parents in family life to direct their child's education and care if we are to stave off these disasters. A traditional education model of objective truth and human dignity must be regained. Parents must stand up against an ideology that has gained so much power in schools.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Evaluating a state’s K–12 education system presents a colossal knowledge problem. The necessary information is dispersed among many layers of government bureaucracy, school administrations, and thousands of classrooms and teachers. There is no centralized location enabling an authority to understand all the factors impacting the children in the state’s public school system.

All the relevant knowledge of what is occurring in public schools ultimately could exist at the individual, parental level. Parents have the opportunity every day to interact with their children, to ask questions, to observe homework and test scores, and more. Government cannot know children as intimately as parents; it can only create a rough approximation through its methods. However, even parents’ knowledge of the type of education their children receive in public schools is complicated by a lack of transparency and accountability in the system, preventing access to curriculum and supplemental materials often provided by outside education organizations to schools.

The experience of the last decade has suggested that the public school monopoly allows a small, politically-organized group to determine what is taught in our schools.¹⁰⁸ Furthermore, the constant battle in American school systems over what content should be taught illustrates a deeper reality. Maine is made up of a diverse group of people who are

passionate about their ideas and beliefs. It is always going to be difficult to force vibrant and thoughtful people into a standardized one size-fits-all *and* highly-politicized public school system.

So long as public schools exist, those with political power will continue to teach their ideas to the exclusion of others. Controversy simply cannot be avoided. Rather than forcing the diverse people of Maine into an ideologically-driven system, Maine has several options to increase educational freedom, transparency, and choice, which would lead to improved curricula in public schools and avoid political fights. Here are some of the options the legislature could pursue:

Transparency Measures

- **New Transparency Laws.** All school districts should be required by law to display their curriculum, reading lists, and teacher/staff training on their school district’s website.¹⁰⁹
- **Legislative Hearings.** State legislators should ask school districts to report to the state about what is going on in their classrooms, especially on the adoption of the eight vehicles for driving CSJ into the curriculum and the effects that CSJ has on student outcomes. A comprehensive report by a legislative committee, detailing what is going on at the local level, would provide the basis for parents to know what is going on in their districts.

- **Parents' Rights Legislation. Opt in.** Require parents to opt in their children for sex education instruction in public schools.

- **School Choice Legislation.** Another species of parents' rights would provide every K-12 student and their family with the ability to choose how and where a child learns. Parental choice in education is the best approach to restoring genuine accountability in a state's school system. Instead of forcing families to send their child to a school system that inculcates their child with ideas antithetical to parents' wishes and beliefs, Maine could embrace the diversity of ideas among families and avoid political fights by allowing money to follow the child. Then children would be able to get coherent instruction suited to their needs and in a manner that is compatible with their family's norms.

- **Charter Schools.** Strengthen charter schools by allowing them to establish teacher certification programs and to opt out of state certification requirements.

- **Reject National Strings.** Additionally, the legislature could ban the Department of Health and Human Services from implementing national grants, such as PREP, which finance sex education curricula, along with the complete elimination and replacement of Common Core.

Regulation of State Agencies

- **Downsize** the MDOE to stifle top-down control of the education system.

- **Limit Vendors.** Prevent school districts from contracting with providers for teacher professional development that promote doctrines and practices that violate the Civil Rights Act.

- **School Board Elections.** Require public school board elections to be held during general elections.

Public education is always political, and numerous Maine public officials have proved that they cannot be trusted with it. Policymakers who care could demand education institutions return to the hard work of imparting academic knowledge and truth to students and—more importantly—restore the rights of parents to direct the education of their children.

CONCLUSION

Stories about social justice radicalism in American schools appear every day. Citizens of Maine may take solace in thinking that Maine is different. Many Maine districts are, after all, responsible and proud. Its politicians seem moderate. What could go wrong? What could *be* wrong?

Answer: Lots of things are wrong and they are going more wrong quickly. Several incidents have happened in Maine, suggesting that the education system in the state is being taken over by CSJ ideology. And the state is indeed being taken over by CSJ ideology. Led by Governor Mills, Maine is adopting policies that have encouraged the sexualization of the curriculum and pervasive guilt and scapegoating. The vehicles of CSJ are infused into the practices of Mills's Department of Education—and the acceptance of national monies is being leveraged to undertake a further, greater revolution. School districts are being encouraged to adopt the SEL curriculum and the equity agenda, as the MDOE promotes

such policies and provides no real alternatives to them. Establishment education groups push the CSJ agenda along as well, calling for a racial reckoning that points toward an education revolution. It is happening in many localities.

The CSJ ideologies are false and destructive, but they are also powerful. They are backed by powerful groups and they seem to fill a void in the human soul. Generally speaking, these ideologies jettison key American concepts like color-blindness, meritocracy, and self-government. They sow turmoil and group antipathy. They undermine attachment to our nation. They curtail America's competitive advantages. They undermine solid family life while extending state power.

We encourage lawmakers and parents to recognize these dangerous ideologies and to adopt ways of life and policies that reject them. No decent country can be built on the foundation of CSJ grievances, and no decent way of life can survive their acceptance.

**“JUSTICE IS THE FIRST VIRTUE OF
SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS, AS TRUTH IS
OF SYSTEMS OF THOUGHT..”**

– John Rawls



APPENDIX A: EQUITY CONSULTANTS

MDOE and prominent establishment education non-profits representing school boards, school administrators, and educators have recommended that districts hire equity consultants. As a result, many Maine school districts have hired equity consultants to guide school administration. With the increased demand for such services, many consultants have arisen across the region and indeed across the country. They suggest that a pretty standard set of policy ideas be implemented at the local level. None of this is mandated. But the failure to adopt such an approach leads to dishonor, so districts across Maine—large and small—have hired equity consultants. Equity consultants lead the way in radicalizing schools, at the behest of the education establishment in the state. In this Appendix, we describe five equity consulting jobs done by four different outfits. Some information was gathered through Freedom of Access Act requests; other information was gathered from publicly-available internet sources.

EXAMPLE 1

Consultant: Maine Intercultural Communication Consultants

Who they are: Maine Intercultural Communication Consultants describes themselves as “focused on intercultural development” and “committed to bridging across difference.”

What they do: The group offers training, assessments, and coaching to schools

aimed at fostering diversity, equity, and inclusion. Trainings include topics such as “white supremacy”¹¹⁰ and “intercultural competence.”¹¹¹ Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) and Individual and Group Debriefs are the main services the group offers to schools. The IDI training aims to build an “inclusive work environment” by determining whether a group has an “intercultural mindset,” one that “welcomes and leverages difference”, or a “monocultural mindset” that “ignores, or judges difference.”

District: Maine School Administrative District (MSAD) 72 (Fryeburg, Brownfield, Denmark, Sweden, Lovell, Stoneham, and Stow).

Year: 2020.

Services Provided:

In step 1 of the training, MSAD 72 administrators took the IDI online for a session that was approximately twenty to thirty minutes long.

In step 2, MSAD 72 administrators participated in Foundational Intercultural Training for a total of four, 1.5 hour-long Zoom sessions.

In step 3, MSAD 72 administrators participated in IDI individual debriefing sessions for a total of 1–1.5 hours.

Total: 8 hours.¹¹²

Total Cost: \$6,046 for Intercultural Inventory and Training.¹¹³

EXAMPLE 2

Consultant: Mid-Atlantic Equity Consortium, Inc.

Who they are: The mission of Mid-Atlantic Equity Consortium, Inc. is to “promote excellence and equity in education to achieve social justice” in the United States. In 2021, the MDOE listed the Mid-Atlantic Equity Consortium, Inc. as the organization managing one of its “regional technical assistance centers” through one of the Mid-Atlantic Equity Consortium, Inc. projects, the “Center for Education Equity.”

What they do: The group focuses on the areas of race, gender, religion, national origin, multiculturalism, and compliance. Mid-Atlantic Equity Consortium, Inc. seeks to transform the school culture and climate to promote equity. They offer schools services, such as an equity audit, comprehensive needs assessments, culturally responsive training, policy and procedural reviews, strategic planning and professional learning.

District: Regional School Unit 5 (Freeport).

Year: 2021.

Services Provided:

The Mid-Atlantic Equity Consortium, Inc. offered Regional School Unit 5 (Freeport) with thirty-seven days of work, which included an equity audit and a needs assessment, consultation and training to implement “educational practices to increase equity and reduce disproportionality in discipline,” trainings and tools “to create equitable and safe learning environments,” and coaching

“in using equity decision making, procedures and practices.” The group conducted twelve days of Focus Group sessions (five days of preparation and seven days of training) with a goal of enabling “the community and schools to recognize, examine and gain an understanding of systemic, institutionalized, and structural issues and challenges.” These “equity focused discussions” included social studies, ELA, and library staff. The group spent sixteen days offering data analysis identifying “inequities” and providing recommendations. “Equity training and professional development” and policy review “through an equity lens” took a total of fifteen days each.

According to a local media article, the Maine Education Association, the state’s largest teachers’ union, “is pushing for more training from similar organizations in the state’s next two-year budget.”¹¹⁴

Additionally, MDOE spokesperson Kelli Deveaux stated that the Department “is deeply committed to ongoing provision of resources, training and professional development to ensure that our schools are safe and inclusive.”¹¹⁵

Total Cost: \$49,755 for “Equity Training” and “Policy Review . . . Through an Equity Lens” from September 1, 2020, through June 30, 2022.¹¹⁶

\$680 for FY21 Contract.¹¹⁷

\$25,000 for FY21 Contract.¹¹⁸ Professional Development for all staff members.

EXAMPLE 3

Consultant: Mid-Atlantic Equity Consortium, Inc.

District: Regional School Unit 21 (Arundel, Kennebunk, Kennebunkport).

Year: 2020.

Services Provided:

Mid-Atlantic Equity Consortium, Inc. worked with RSU 21 to “improve and increase equitable education opportunities.” The group implemented a three-year plan that included the following: “collaboratively develop[ing] a strategic plan for educational equity; conduct[ing] a root cause analysis of discipline, school climate, and academic data; perform[ing] an equity review of the district’s policies and procedures policies and practices; and support[ing] ongoing professional development for staff and administrators.”

Phase I of the plan involved Mid-Atlantic Equity Consortium, Inc.’s Center for Education Equity (CEE) leading focus groups of students, parents, staff, and community members about equity.¹²⁰ The focus group evaluations were used to make recommendations for transforming the school district. The group stacks focus groups with biased individuals seeking to advance the social justice mission. No opinions opposing the social justice ideology are included in the report. Participants expressed concerns about the “pervasiveness of white supremacy,” the relationship between “racial diversity” and “equity,” how to “deal with” the issues of “LGBTQ, ageism, sexism, homophobia, heterosexuals or classism.”

The CEE concluded that the community wanted the district to further advance equity and recommended the district hire an equity officer, create a district-wide equity task force, and develop a district-wide strategic plan for equity and diversity.

Total Cost: Unknown.

According to local media, Mid-Atlantic Equity Consortium, Inc. does work in other large school districts in Maine, including Kennebunk, Portland, Scarborough, and Westbrook¹²¹ For example, the superintendent of Westbrook claimed the groups “review of Westbrook school’s curriculum for inclusivity and racial equity could result in long-term changes to what the schools teach.”¹²²

EXAMPLE 4

Consultant: Panorama Education, Inc.

Who they are: Panorama Education administers surveys, collects data, and conducts data analysis to shape school climate, culture, teaching and learning, community engagement, and students’ social-emotional learning.

What they do: Panorama Education conducts surveys of students, parents, teachers, and staff, analyzes this data, and provides coaching and support to schools.¹²³ Surveys measure various topics, including social emotional learning and how staff and students are thinking and feeling about diversity, equity, and inclusion. Some Panorama surveys include questions targeted at young students about gender, sexual orientation, and student views on racial issues.

District: MSAD 72

Year: 2015–18.

Services provided: Student survey administration, data analysis and reporting.

Total Cost: \$13,500 over four years.

On September 1, 2015, Panorama Education, Inc. billed MSAD 72 a total of \$2,000 for a number of

items, including “access to platform and support; survey administration, analysis and reporting,” as well as online student surveys for two thousand students enrolled in the school district.¹²⁴

On July 5, 2016, Panorama Education, Inc. billed MSAD 72 another \$2,000 for the same services.¹²⁵

On July 1, 2017, Panorama Education, Inc. billed MSAD 72 another \$2,000 for the same services.¹²⁶

On July 3, 2018, Panorama Education, Inc. billed MSAD 72 a slightly higher amount of \$3,500 for the same services as during the previous years.¹²⁷

On July 31, 2019, Panorama Education, Inc. billed MSAD 72 a price bump of \$4,000 for the same services as during the previous years.¹²⁸

EXAMPLE 5

Consultant: Abbott & Associates

District: Regional School Unit 22 (Hampden).

Who they are: Abbott & Associates describe themselves as “committed to enhancing the professional lives of those we serve by providing exceptional partnerships in employment solutions. We will be recognized as fair and professional where diversity is promoted.”

What they do: Among other services, Abbott & Associates offer school districts equity audits, surveys, data analyses, and policy recommendations to increase diversity and equity in the schools.

Services provided: Among other services, Abbott & Associates did the following: they developed and delivered an equity-audit presentation for the RSU 22 school board; they built out and tested the faculty/staff equity

survey, administering the survey to all RSU 22 employees; they built out and tested the parent/family equity survey, preparing it for administration; they analyzed and documented findings from all three equity surveys; they recommended strategies related to the release of the final equity audit report; and they prepared and delivered two presentations to the district school board addressing equity-audit progress, findings, and recommendations related to faculty and student equity in the district.¹²⁹

Total Cost: \$15,000 over eight months.

\$2,500 on December 24, 2020, for an equity audit, including a review of district documents and data, such as district policies, survey responses, and school board presentations.

\$2,500 on April 9, 2021, for an equity audit that included research on equity surveys and an equity audit presentation to the RSU 22 school board.

\$2,500 on May 28, 2021, for an equity audit that included building out and testing the parent/family equity survey and preparing it for administration.

\$2,500 on July 14, 2021, for an equity audit, including facilitating leadership team meetings, preparing presentations, and delivering progress reports and recommended strategies related to the release of the final audit report.

\$5,000 on July 28, 2021, for developing and administering a customized equity survey for students in sixth through twelfth grade and delivering two presentations to the district school board addressing the equity audit progress, findings, and recommendations related to faculty and student equity in the district.

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