

To Whom It May Concern:

October 13, 2020

My name is [REDACTED] and my husband, [REDACTED] and I currently have three students in the Lower Merion School District. I am writing tonight regarding my daughter's 5th grade class in which a book entitled Front Desk by Kelly Yang was assigned. After reading Yang's book, it left me with a feeling of anger and worry.

The school district has recently implemented a new curriculum which intends to teach students about "anti-racism" and race relations in this country. We believe you are teaching racism.

Both my husband and I strongly value our responsibility to teach our children about racism. We have and will continue to instill the values of moral character. That means being kind and respectful to all no matter their color, gender or religion. We also instill the love of this country and to appreciate the freedoms and liberties we are so fortunate to enjoy. This includes freedom of speech, freedom of religion and the notion that not all people live in a democratic republic such as our own.

The United States of America is the most tolerant country in the world. Our family came from other countries where they were oppressed and at the time they arrived here, there were laws still active that discriminated against people of color, Jews and other religions and minorities, but those laws do not exist today in our country. America is not systemically racist. There are racist individuals of all colors and social classes, but in spite of this, people all over the world seek to come and build a better life here because it is fair and just.

Recently, there has been a lot of talk about "White Privilege" and "White supremacy". The concept that if you are Caucasian, you have a duty to admit that you are a racist and you are responsible for ending racism. We are encouraged to talk about our differences with friends who are of a different color. How does discussing our differences bring us closer together? We should encourage our children to find commonality to establish friendships and personal connection. Our children have friends of many colors and religions. They only see them as people, playmates, classmates, other kids. This goes against everything that this country was built upon. It has now become a popular part of the Lower Merion School District's new curriculum. This is indoctrination. Why must white children feel guilty and apologize for the way they were born? The idea that only white people are racists is categorically false and inherently racist. My husband and I vehemently reject this. When you teach these young malleable children this concept, you are creating a generation of people who will only see others as a certain color, gender or religion.

The book Front Desk is a story about a young Chinese family who has come to the United States illegally to pursue their American Dream. They have high hopes and expectations, but they're deeply disappointed when they learn that it's not so easy after all. On many occasions the author identifies characters in the book by their race and gender in a negative light. For example, chapter 12, page 57 it says, "...slightly disheveled-looking white man..." And again in chapter 41, page 177 "...He was another white guy, stern-looking, about forty years old..." Chapter 21, page 96 it reads "...There were two officers, both male and white..."

If we're teaching kids to be tolerant and non-judgemental of all people, why does the author continuously point out her characters' race and gender? She doesn't miss an opportunity to characterize Caucasian and wealthy people as racist and evil while brown people are consistently portrayed as victims and inherently good.

The author also depicts the United States as a racist and selfish country throughout the book. For example, in chapter 21, page 96, Mia's father confronts Mr. Yao when he accuses Hank of stealing Mr. Lorenz's car simply because he is African American. "Sir, we can't judge

someone based on their skin color. It isn't right. This is America." Mr. Yao responds, "If you really believe that, you're even dumber than I thought. Clearly you have no idea how this country really works."

On page 100, Mia consoles Hank after he is interrogated by the police on suspicion of stealing Mr. Lorenz's car. Hank says, "This kind of thing happens to me all the time...to all black people in this country. In some way or the other." The final example I will cite is found in chapter 56 pages 240-241. Mia reveals to her parents that she spent \$300 to enter an essay contest in which the winning contestant will become the new owner of a small hotel in Vermont. The owners, an elderly couple, are ready to retire and are searching for the perfect new owner. Mia's parents are shocked and dismayed by this news. Her mother, so disappointed that Mia spent this money so frivolously and irresponsibly, tells her that she will not win this contest because it surely must be rigged! Mia rejects her mother's reply and is convinced that the couple holding this contest must be doing it out of the goodness of their hearts. To which Mia's mother responds, "Have you ever seen anybody in this country do something out of the goodness of their heart?"

This particular paragraph of the book angered me the most. The author is making a shockingly cynical statement about American exceptionalism. What a way to make your students feel awful about themselves and the country they were born and live in. Instead of feeling proud and honoring and learning from our country's mistakes and celebrating our greatest successes, we are teaching these children to feel disdain and guilt. Loving one's country and rejecting bigotry are not mutually exclusive. Not to mention the irony, in which the author came here as an illegal immigrant and graduated from UC Berkeley and then went on to graduate from Harvard Law School. She is the American dream! She is reaping the benefits from the very country that she trashes in her book. The hypocrisy is mind blowing.

No parent should have to worry or wonder about what propaganda the school district is injecting into our children's curriculum. We are demanding that you provide parents with a list of any and all materials related to this syllabus and the option to opt-out. Parents are the ones who should control how their child should think, not the school. We are happy to discuss this in person.

My husband and I feel that the responsibility of teaching our children about racism and discrimination is our job alone. The school district has no right to take liberties to indoctrinate them about "White Privilege" and the premise that America is bad and American people are bad. As Jews, we are no strangers to anti-Semitism and bias. However, judging and accusing one broad group of people for discrimination of another based on race or class is the very essence of racism. There are racist people in this country, but our laws are just, kind and generous. We reject these ideas and your program and will not allow our children to participate. We believe in education, NOT indoctrination.