



April 12, 2023

Superintendent Sebert and the School District of Waukesha School Board,

I write today because I am deeply troubled by the harm caused as you've applied the School District of Waukesha's controversial issues policy. Whether you realize it or not, you are, under the guise of protection, causing undue harm to students and staff. However, this damage is reversible. It is paramount that you change course now.

As district leaders, you can choose to reevaluate the use of the controversial issues policy. Instead of eliminating conversation on topics that you have in the past deemed controversial, the district can instead choose to foster inclusive environments where staff, students, and families are able to "identify important issues, explore fully and fairly all sides of an issue, weigh carefully the values and factors involved, and develop techniques for formulating and evaluating positions."¹ Doing this will send a clear message to the residents of Waukesha and all of Wisconsin about the high priority you place on ensuring a well-rounded education for your students that reflects the pluralistic nature of our society.

As district leaders, you can choose to re-evaluate the decision to place a district employee on administrative leave and, instead, recognize that "acknowledging the rights of [the district's] professional staff members as citizens in a democratic society"² is, in fact, in the best interests of the School District of Waukesha. Taking this action will send a meaningful message to the school staff of Waukesha and staff across Wisconsin about the importance of honoring the full selves of our educators.

The decisions you have made as district leaders have intensified the stressors our teachers feel and helped create and continue to perpetuate a toxic environment. Toxicity undoubtedly contributes to teachers leaving the profession, and we cannot afford to lose our educator workforce to misguided choices made in the name of student protection. You can make a different choice. If not, I worry for the future of the Waukesha district in its ability to attract and retain teachers and educators in the future school years.

¹ <https://go.boarddocs.com/wi/wauk/Board.nsf/goto?open&id=CH8DHX35E43F#>

² <https://go.boarddocs.com/wi/wauk/Board.nsf/goto?open&id=CH8DHX35E43F#>

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It is imperative you make sound decisions in the coming days. The students of the School District of Waukesha are counting on you to develop their capacity and skills to be ready for future study, integration into the workforce, and civic involvement in their community. To achieve your district's own mission, students must attend schools where topics are explored, and employees are respected. I urge you to prioritize the needs of your educators, students, and their families, and do the right thing.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Jill Underly". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Jill" and last name "Underly" clearly legible.

Jill K. Underly, PhD
Wisconsin State Superintendent
Department of Public Instruction