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School board threatened with lawsuit over training program

By JOSH GREGA, NEWS-PRESS STAFF-WRITER

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The Santa Barbara Unified School District Board of Education was threatened with a lawsuit at its Tuesday meeting over training programs provided by the nonprofit Just Communities Central Coast.

Board members are considering three memorandums of understanding that would allow JCCC to continue planning and facilitating professional development and training programs that address issues of diversity, inclusion and equity in schools.

Among these programs are implicit bias training and attending the Institute for Equity in Education.

The latter is explained in a JCCC document: "The Institute for Equity in Education is designed to help district and school administrators, board members, teachers, counselors, security personnel, all support staff, educational policy makers, and others who play a role in educating young people to effectively deal with the racial and ethnic disparities in their schools."

While board members were uniformly in favor of the MOU's goals, the item's one and only public comment, from attorney Eric Early, was anything but favorable.

Mr. Early told the board he represents "a group of concerned parents and taxpayers" who were afraid of speaking out against Just Communities Central Coast for fear of being silenced and unfairly labeled. He then threatened that the group would sue if the board adopts the MOUs.

"I'm here to tell you that the board should consider long and hard and very carefully of the legal exposure it will face if it enters these MOUs," he said.

Mr. Early denounced Just Communities Central Coast curriculum as "radical, discriminatory, and illegal," and claimed it violates various anti-discrimination laws as well as the Santa Barbara Unified School District's own regulations.

He then delved into some of the curriculum from the JCCC document, particularly definitions of terms like "racism" and "oppression."

He read the document's definition of racism: "A system of oppression based on race that privileges white people and targets people of color."

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He continued with its definition of "oppression," "A system that benefits some groups (often called 'privileged' white groups) and disadvantages other groups (often called 'target groups' people of color)."

Mr. Early criticized the definitions and said they wouldn't be found in a dictionary.

He called the curriculum content "political" and "divisive," and requested the MOUs be tabled and the curriculum made available to the Santa Barbara community for review.

Throughout the remainder of the meeting board members expressed support for the JCCC's requests to continue its contract with the district into the 2018-2019 school year, but did not discuss Mr. Early's criticisms of its curriculum.

The board ultimately voted to table the MOUs and requested that their content be converted into contracts.

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