

The purpose of this document is to give a brief summary of glaring concerns that we as parents had while reviewing Second Step's Social Emotional Learning Curriculum for 8th grade and to direct other parents who have similar concerns toward the lessons where these issues appear. *

Bullying/Harassment, particularly through a racial lens: When Second Step discusses bullying/harassing/taunting, "power and privilege" is one of three social factors that contribute to this behavior. Second Step asserts that "sometimes people experience privilege based on race and gender," and also lists "power and privilege" as a reason for bullying. These ideas are associated with Critical Race Theory. Considering that white students are almost always portrayed in the role of the aggressor in these lessons, this suggests they are the race with more power and privilege than the students of color. In general, race is a primary factor Second Step focuses their bullying lessons on. So instead of this SEL program focusing on unity to achieve equality in the classroom, they instead want to achieve "equity" by resurrecting racism, and pushing the narratives of white power and white privilege.

Lessons 2, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13

LGBTQIA: Besides race, Second Step also focuses heavily on gay and transgender issues when discussing bullying/harassment. These lessons do not simply list these areas as reasons students are bullied. Rather, these reasons are prioritized over others in the lessons. The program encourages students to accept these ideologies to a point they are willing to defend them (see social justice activism below). This goes further than just teaching children that they should be accepting and inclusive of people that are different than them by treating everyone with kindness. It could also be noted that focusing on gender and sexual orientation in lessons where sensitive topics are discussed as a class may expose students to ideas and concepts that go against parental consent and familial or religious beliefs.

Lessons 2, 11, 13

Social Justice Activism: Throughout the Second Step 8th grade curriculum are phrases and lessons that are designed to spur students on to rally for particular causes. Students are asked to: "create a plan for disrupting factors" and "choose a disruption strategy" as a way of "challenging and changing attitudes, beliefs, traditions, or practices that make bullying and harassment socially acceptable." The term "disrupt" is often associated with movements like Antifa and Black Lives Matter. Some of the causes that Second Step is trying to normalize and even get the students to socially defend (like homosexuality or transgenderism) actually go against certain religious attitudes, and familial beliefs. For example, in one lesson, students are assigned a service project in which they will "work to reduce sexual or gender harassment so everyone in their community can feel safe and accepted." Students must identify the effects that sexual and gender harassment has on people in the community, then investigate ways they can help support people who experience sexual or gender harassment by starting a public awareness campaign, writing letters to newspapers, or supporting a community organization. As a part of one lesson plan, "teachers need to have a list ready of organizations that are active in the community to help students expand their investigation" into volunteering, and in another teachers are told to "have a list ready of community organizations that support people who experience sexual or gender harassment." Since the Second Step program strongly advocates for gay and transgender students as well as Transformative SEL which promotes the tenets of critical race theory, both of these situations open the

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door for teachers who feel inclined to suggest organizations to students with a particular political lean and ideological agenda. Other phrases found throughout the 8th grade lessons that encourage activism are: “stand up and speak out”, “decide how you’ll put your (disruption) strategy into action”, “start a social movement in your community or online by leading a discussion, making a poster or starting a hashtag on social media”, and “stand up for change”. The slide with the “Stand Up for Change Plan” depicts seven fists in the air, the biggest fist being that of a black person’s. Traditionally, this is a symbol of black power and of solidarity against oppression, and has most recently been affiliated with the Black Lives Matter movement. One of the criticisms of CRT and its tenants is that it is trying to turn children into social justice activists. Introducing this symbol and this type of verbiage in these lessons supports the idea that this curriculum may have this goal as well.

Lessons 7, 11, 12, 13

Sex Ed: When discussing unhealthy relationships, a slide says “For more information, support and advice, visit loveisrespect.org.” This national hotline is suggested to students on several occasions in multiple lessons (in a student handout and on the slide presentations). This site would teach 13-year-old student directed to this website from Second Step to clear their browser history and exit out quickly to prevent someone knowing they are looking at this website. Instead of just being an informational site for those reporting abuse, this website also has topics such as “5 tips for your first time (having sex)”, and “Dating in the Closet.” It says that “sex can be an important part of your relationship”, and when deciding if you are ready to date you should ask yourself if you are “looking for something casual, exclusive monogamy, or an open relationship, like polyamory?” It even gives advice on what to do if your partner is blackmailing you. This is among other non-age-appropriate subject matter. This link that Second Step is referring students to is not within the bounds of sex education as legislated by Utah legislators and violates parental consent.

Lessons 21, 25

Sensitive Topics: Second Step admits in teacher lesson plans that “in some lessons, we’ll discuss personal and sensitive topics that could bring up strong emotions or opinions. It’s important to set class norms to help everyone feel safe and comfortable.” Some of the sensitive topics mentioned in the 8th grade lessons include: students being sexist by making comments about girls’ clothes or bodies, “stereotypes and beliefs about how boys and girls should act or look,” a scenario where there is “unwanted touching in the stairwell” at school, divorce, family illness, cutting themselves, drinking alcohol (or other self-destructive ways of managing stress), having thoughts of harming themselves or others, discussing with a partner/class things that cause stress, responding to rejection, what healthy/unhealthy (abuse/bullying) relationships (including dating) look like, how you should respond if you feel pressured to do something you don’t want to do in a dating relationship, etc. A student being forced to discuss these topics in a socially awkward group situation or in pairs is akin to group therapy, which should be conducted by a licensed clinical psychologist and not a teacher. A licensed clinical psychologist has signed a code of ethics and if that code is broken, he/she would lose their license. There is no such oversight when teachers practice therapy. Teachers may not know how to handle what Second Step refers to as the “strong emotions or opinions” that these “personal and sensitive topics could bring up”, expressed privately in pairs or in large numbers in a group setting. Also, students being

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put in a situation where they are asked to share their fears and most vulnerable feelings publically could provide ammunition to class bullies who could later use that against them. The school's role is to focus on education and not to discuss children's values, attitudes and beliefs. Parents should be discussing topics such as these with their children without the possible exposure to other ideas that may be political or controversial and not aligned with the family's beliefs or values.

Lessons 1, 9, 11, 12, 15, 18, 19, 21, 25, 26, 27

Parents not a part of the child's support system: Almost always, when talking about whom students can go to for support and encouragement when facing challenges or help when pursuing their interest and goals, parents are either mentioned last (behind teachers, friends, mentors, counselor/advisor, administrator, other students, study group, band, guitar instructor, partner, community) or not at all. Sometimes parents are even cast in a negative light as an example of a possible roadblock when it comes to students' future interests (i.e. "not having the support of my parents"). The introductory video in the 8th grade curriculum shows a vigil after a school shooting and a Black Lives Matter protest. The narrator says that parents didn't face what students are facing today. The entire curriculum starts out by suggesting that parents don't know or understand and therefore can't help the students. It creates a gap between the students and their parents or family. This continues in subsequent lessons as parents are portrayed as controlling, unsupportive and even ignorant. Students should always be referred to their parents and family first as their primary educators and supporters in life.

Lessons 1, 5, 7, 8, 17, 19, 22, 27

***Note:**

Process – As a group of parents, we went to our school district to review the Second Step curriculum. We looked at some lessons as a group and at some individually. When looking at a lesson, we would review the Lesson Plan (given to the teacher), the Student Handout (given to the students) and the lesson itself (played for the children - sort of like a PowerPoint presentation with slides, pictures, cartoon videos and actual videos of classrooms or of students talking to the camera, or a skit played out). We also reviewed the Quick Start Guides. These are videos at the beginning of each Unit that prepare the teacher to teach the lesson. They include tips, a summary of the content and instructions.

Opinions - These notes represent our opinions as we looked at this 8th Grade curriculum. The purpose of this report is to inform those who do not have hours to spend combing through the curriculum and to direct readers where to look for specific examples of our concerns. Again, these are just our opinions as we reviewed the materials – each person is free to make their own opinions and to agree or disagree with our assessment of the curriculum.

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