

11/3/2015

Mrs. Tousignant and Dr. Williams,

I appreciate your efforts to make NOVA a safer and more inclusive school environment.

I would like to respond to some of the letters that have been written expressing displeasure with the anti-bullying efforts at NOVA. My upfront disclaimer is that I am gay and my wife and I have 2 children at NOVA. I believe that this gives me a very experienced perspective on some of these arguments. There are considerations that non-traditional families must take into account that more traditional families do not. For the most part, our lives are quite similar. We work, pay our bills and so on. We worry about our kids, teach them, take care of them. We worry about their lives, their choices and whether they will have friends. We die a little inside when they are picked on and left out; we celebrate when they have friends. We struggle with knowing when it's time to step in and advocate and when to let them figure it out on their own.

For my family, there were some additional concerns regarding school. For many people, finding the right school fit is hard; for us, we had an extra layer of anxiety. How would the other children react when our girls say they have 2 moms? How do we fill out the school form that has space for a mother and a father but no space for 2 moms? Is this a sign of a school that was not accepting of gay families or simply something that was over-looked? What happens if our children have a teacher who looks down on our family and somehow communicates that to our kids? How do we teach them to gauge the situation for safety? Would we be accepted in the larger community?

Openly acknowledging others and even providing education is not a "celebration of their lifestyle". It is simply giving a person who is disenfranchised and often put down and ridiculed the message that they matter. It is, in fact, acting with compassion. It provides information; it does not advocate or tell someone else they must approve; it does give the message that no one can be treated unfairly. To do otherwise is not compassionate; it is, in fact, quite harmful.

To use language such as "controversial moral difference" is exactly the language that gives people the message that who they are is wrong. The implicit statement is that the person is, quite frankly, morally wrong. Let's not pretend otherwise. It is the same message that my community has gotten for many years; it's more polite, less coarse, but the impact is the same. Speaking as someone who was gay identified in the 1970's, I can tell you that the consequences for children hearing that they have a 'controversial moral difference' is devastating- I realized I could not share anything about myself with anyone, for fear that they would figure out this secret. I can also tell you, as someone who was involved for years in the fundamentalist right wing movement in the 1980's, that the message is quite clear: that people with a different moral underpinning are wrong/bad/undeserving or "other". It's a message that will internalize with significant negative repercussions. For the children hearing this message, that implication presents a stronger message than any anti-bullying statement the parent or teacher makes. There are a lot of anti-gay messages kids get from their communities. If the best we can do is to send messages of toleration or reticent acceptance- this will confirm other messages that they are 'less-than' others and all they can hope for is others' pity. If we want children to truly feel safe and valued, we need to counter-act other messages they're getting with requires messages which are entirely positive, such as we find in the books being proposed. To do otherwise, to stand up and say that certain lives should not be discussed except in the confines of the home is to give the message of shame and will promote bullying.

When you say that you are against bullying and support anti-bullying efforts as long as those uncomfortable 'lifestyles' are not openly discussed, you are, in effect, telling those populations to stay invisible and that they are not deserving of the same respect and consideration you would give others. No matter how you wordsmith it,

that is the all-too-clear message. When we force children to be invisible it harms not only them but the children who are watching; they learn that they need to hide any of their differences as well.

The responsibility of the administration at NOVA is to reinforce that everyone deserves to be respected and not to be told that they are so “other” that they can only be discussed in secret. It really is the idea that consideration and kindness are valued and that each person is important and valuable.

Sincerely,

Theresa Nelson

November 4, 2015

Dear Members of the Nova Classical Academy School Board and Members of the School Climate Committee:

My comments today are to let you, the Nova Classical Academy School Board and School Climate Committee, know that I support the school's current initiative to show unity against all types of bullying. As a teacher at this public school for all of its thirteen years, we must continue to show that our school's culture is to act with our five virtues in mind at all times, not at selective moments.

Why are some people trying to draw a line on where virtue starts or ends? We will protect from bullying the student who is having difficulty learning to read, but not a boy wearing purple shoes? We protect the student who has glasses, but not a girl who likes to play with matchbox cars? We protect from harassment a student who is on the autism spectrum, but not a boy who has pink on his backpack? We stop students from laughing at a student who has challenges with memorizing poetry, but not from laughing at a student with two dads?

One person shared at the recent Board meeting his concern of where we would draw the line – would we address bullying related to students who are overweight? Bullying of students who have body odor? The answer should be and is YES – we as teachers would address bullying of these types as well. Another person shared that people were being forced to embrace something that they don't believe. No one is forcing anyone to embrace anything. Embracement is not one of our virtues, and is not what is being suggested. What we are doing is uniting against all types of bullying.

We are a public school, where choosing who is protected from non-virtuous behaviors has already been decided – by our school being a public school. **Everyone is protected.** It is now the School Climate Committee and Nova Classical Academy School Board's job to make sure that the school is in fact making that protection universal.

Sincerely,

Chad Long

Grade Three Teacher

clong@novaclassical.org

11/5/15

Dear Members of the Nova Classical Academy School Board and Members of the School Climate Committee,

I have read Mr. Long's public comment and would like to say that I also support the school's current initiative to show unity against ALL types of bullying.

I have the honor of teaching all 470 grammar students, Grades K-5; I know all their names and personalities and I care deeply about each and every one of them! I want all my students to feel safe, valued, and respected. I want them to know kindness and compassion.

I want them all to have a happy song in their hearts at the end of each school day, and to look forward to learning and coming to school the next day.

Sincerely,

Ms. Urbrock

11/8/15

I am concerned about the ongoing drift of Nova away from its classical principles, indeed away from its very name, Nova Classical Academy. I speak as an educational amateur, except insofar as I have skin in the game, my own three children, and my hope that someday Nova will also be available to my grandchildren.

From its founding not very long ago, this school unified parents from diverse ideological backgrounds around the idea of the worth of ancient principles, virtues, knowledge, their relevance to our times.

What I see is an apparent mistrust of the sufficiency of these ideals, indeed of Nova's own mission, to speak to us, and the crowding out in the precious few hours the students have with Plato, Virgil, Dante, Voltaire, and so many others.

Nova espouses justice, temperance, prudence, and fortitude, and the classical curriculum is designed according to these. In what has sense has the passage of a mere decade shown these wanting, in need of an overlay of some non-classical fad of pedagogy? Nova's own founding was a rejection of this parade of reactive solutions.

My family's experience with student life leads us only to hope the Nova shows the courage (fortitude, if you will) to stay the course.

My fear is that, extrapolating current apparent trends, Nova as a classical institution, indeed as any institution (it is either classical or it is nothing), will cease to exist for any grandchildren I may see, and indeed, even for the youngest of my children. Without the genius of its curriculum, Nova is merely a school that delivers heavy homework and low grades and the consequent narrowing of college choices for its graduates.

We have already rejected much of the current content and method of education, and can already see the success of it in a dozen short years. Let us have the courage continue.

Thank you for your consideration,

Thomas and Kari Walker

11/11/15

I was unable to log into the petition to sign it. Please accept that we would happily have added our names if we'd been able to do so.

Comment: Make all children welcome! Nova's teachers are well versed in offering conscientious, efficient and factual information on many subjects. Trust them to handle this situation in the same manner.

Jennifer and Scott Johnson

11/11/15

To the Nova School Board,

At the Listening Session on Monday, I heard quite a few parents arguing against reading *My Princess Boy* by suggesting that including it in Nova's anti-bullying curriculum would swiftly lead us down a slippery slope paved (apparently) with picture books and compassion.

I think I speak for quite a few parents at the session when I say that *by all means*, if there's a child at Nova who's being teased for being fat, or disabled, or anxious, or for any other reason, and there's a book that could help lead their classmates to more compassionate behavior, then I would *absolutely* like for such a book to be read. For example, *Wemberley Worried* by Kevin Henkes would be a terrific book to share with the class of any child dealing with anxiety. There was a mother who spoke at the meeting who is going through chemotherapy for cancer; if it would make her children feel more supported at school to have the book *Nowhere Hair* read, or at least made available, I would be entirely in favor!

Protecting kids is not a zero-sum game.

Before my kids attended Nova, they went to Seward Montessori in Minneapolis. Seward Montessori at the time was 15-20% Muslim, with most of those kids immigrants or the children of immigrants from Somalia. The school had no uniform, and a very loose dress code. At some point I noticed that I saw a lot of eccentric clothing choices, and yet I almost never saw kids get teased, and I realized that to make sure that the Muslim girls were not teased over their hijabs, the school had quietly implemented a policy where saying *anything* negative about someone's clothing would result in the adults coming down on you like a ton of bricks. This did a great job of protecting the Muslim girls; it also protected my older daughter, who at the time liked to dress in head-to-toe bright orange. It protected the boy in her class who wore an old leopard-print women's coat as his winter coat. It protected the kids whose clothes very obviously came from thrift shops. Taking that step to protect the Somali girls *made it a better school for all the children*.

I had three other thoughts about this that I wanted to share with the board.

First of all, many of the parents speaking against the book insisted that the approach the school uses now works just fine. I'm sure it does seem that way to them; their kids are not the ones being bullied by older grade schoolers at breakfast. I think it was very clear, both from what the parents of the kindergartner who is being bullied said and what the 12th grader who spoke said, that the people who say the status quo is fine are simply incorrect. There have been problems, which are visible to the people who are having the problems even if they are not visible to everyone at the school. There is a *kindergartner* who has not been safe at school. And this needs to be fixed.

Second, from the parents speaking against the book, I heard a lot of nostalgia for the way things were before the non-gender conforming child arrived. I would like Nova to be very clear that this student is not the problem, and not the one creating problems.

Third, regarding kids teased over other issues -- from what Mr. Long says, it's entirely routine to read a book to help educate kids and manage interpersonal drama. If a child with a visible physical disability had enrolled in Nova's kindergarten, and had run into problems, and his parents had come to the school and said, "we'd like you to read 'Some Kids Have Wheelchairs' to help the other kids in the lower school understand that teasing him isn't okay," -- I don't think it would have even occurred to Nova to send advance notification to parents that they were going to read this book, and if it had, you would not have been flooded with calls from people who wanted to fret about a slippery slope, or dilution of the curriculum, or who wanted to insist (repeatedly) that since the Americans with Disabilities Act does not *explicitly require* Nova to read books about disabilities than there is no reason to do it.

Please prioritize the safety of non-gender-conforming students over the insecurities of Nova's vocal conservative minority.

Thank you,

Naomi Kritzer

11/11/15

Dear Nova Community,

Our school is called a "Classical Academy." With these words, we communicate our commitment to an educational pedigree inherited from the first Academy founded by Plato in Athens in 387 BCE.

Since Socrates first challenged the convictions of the Athenian elite, we see in example after example --from antiquity through our modern age -- that our shared purpose as Classical Educators is to build character through the continued *Pursuit* of Truth. This is quite a different task than teaching students to "know Truth." For Classical Philosophy as well as our modern common sense demonstrate that "knowing Truth" is available only to the omniscient (All-Knowing).

The frustrations faced by Socrates, and the inheritors of Classical Education, is embodied by those who claim special privilege in *knowing* Truth. While perhaps well meaning, they assert dogma as universal without aid from the tools developed from Classical Philosophy. They are unable to challenge their own cultural, temporal, and personal biases and become enslaved to their Convictions.

Convictions are the traditional enemy of Learning for it presumes that Truth is known. If truth is known, then there is no further need for inquiry and the continued Pursuit of Truth. Thus there is no need for Education. Convictions are often rooted in misinformation and fear; sustained by arrogance. They provide a convenient excuse for willful ignorance. When held fast they provide self-justification for bullying. They are the un-virtuous stain on the character of the Warlord and a detriment to a just and virtuous Democratic citizen.

It is within this context of Classical Education that we frame the Anti-Bullying policy with regard to Gender Non-Conformity. Gender Non-Conformity is not some new trendy human experience (Pants on women, "Beatle haircuts" instead of buzz-cuts on men, women in the workplace, playing basketball, girls beating boys in fencing bouts, men at home raising children etc.). What is new is our exercise of Fortitude and Justice to grow awareness into the variety of gender expression.

This pursuit of human Truth speaks to our respect for the dignity of all humans. As our inquiries chip away at the fear-based convictions which have so dominated our wider culture with negative images (e.g. salacious "Jerry Springer-esque" stories of promiscuity; maladjusted psychopathic murderers in movies; or the unlikely scenario in which a boy would willingly cross-dress simply to spy on girls in the locker rooms.) we can finally get at the real stories of lived experience which go well beyond the simpler subjects of gender roles and clothing choices. We can begin to respect and understand our fellow citizens and our children. Ultimately we come to the mature realization that being GNC is not about sex and no one is looking for some kind of special status or celebration.

What a GNC student is looking for is simply not to be beat up and humiliated on a day to day basis. They seek some acknowledgement for their right to exist and learn without fear from staff, faculty and parents of students who might otherwise grow to be their lifelong friends. The adoption of the book *My Princess Boy* is very tiny step in the right direction.

Sincerely,

K. Christian McGuire,

Nova Parent, Volunteer and K-5 Fencing Coach

11/11/15

Dear School Climate Committee and Nova Board of Directors,

I learned today that it might still be useful to provide feedback about the new anti-bullying content.

So, for what it is worth, I would like to offer my feedback:

- **Lesson plan sent out by Dr. Williams today: excellent!** Thank you.
- **Please use additional tools, books, activities, etc.**, now or in the future, with or without informing me in advance - I trust my children's judgment to understand, and I also trust the judgment of the school committees, administrators, faculty and staff with the anti-bullying curriculum just as I trust these groups with other curricular decisions and implementation.
- **Okay with me: gender (gay/lesbian/transgender issues included along with gender nonconformity), race, religion/lack of religion, size, age, ability, etc.** These topics are fine with me. We already discuss these topics at home without incident.
- **Anyone can bully/be bullied.** I would like students to be provided with information that any child or adult is susceptible to bully or be bullied no matter what groups they belong to, and that it can be difficult to know when you are caught up in bullying. So, it is best to be exceedingly careful of others' feelings at all times - especially when you least feel like it.

Bullying is a topic where Nova can do what it does best: exceed government expectations and **prepare students "not just for school but for life."**

Thank you for your consideration of all feedback. If you would like any help with this project, **I am happy to help** in any way I can.

Jennie Winter

Mother of Jimmy (4th grade), Mary Beth (2nd) and David (preschool)

11/11/15

We are who we are. I believe we get to choose how we act not our parents or our friends or anyone. It's OK to be different. This is something we need to show Kindergarteners. They are at an age where they need to learn to respect everyone no matter who they are. Please allow the Princess Boy to be read.

Max Ehrlich

Lauren Dee
1378 Como Blvd. E.
St. Paul, MN 55117

November 11, 2015

To the School Climate Committee and Nova Board of Directors:

I am the parent of two Nova students. I write to voice my strong support for Nova's continued efforts to promote a culture of tolerance, including through its use of educational materials that relate to non-conforming gender. I believe there is strong support for Nova's efforts among a majority of Nova parents and other stakeholders.

Thank you for your consideration.

/s/Lauren Dee

Lauren Dee

11/12/15

Hello,

I would just like to officially state my support for My Princess Boy and any other similar materials that could be used to promote acceptance and tolerance of our differences. I would like both the school climate committee and the board to know that the type of response a school shows in the face of a civil rights issue weighs heavily in the decision my husband and I will make about where to send our son (soon to be sons) to school.

Not everyone is a stereotype, and not everyone is religious, and not everyone follows the same personal guidelines that others may have for how to think and what to like. In a society often the majority can feel threatened somehow when people not in the majority (be it cultural, ethnic, linguistic, religious, economic, social, etc.) are open about their differences. That doesn't mean that those people in the majority, vocal or adamant as they may be, need to be given any credence. They do have a right to vocally oppose something that they don't like but it is the responsibility of leadership, I believe, to ignore those protests.

I believe it's unjust and therefore against Nova's own teachings not to make sure every student is treated equally and respectfully. It is certainly unvirtuous to make any human being feel like he or she is looked down upon, "broken," or wrong to simply *like* something.

We are not talking about accepting anyone who is breaking the law or is abusive to others. None of the arguments against this book or type of teaching that I have heard seem justifiable to me. They seem to be for the most part based on personal religion, which is unjust and un-American to impose on others, or founded on an idea that making sure someone gets *equal* treatment somehow means they are receiving an undue amount of extra protection. If it takes an exceptional amount of attention to make sure someone is being treated *equally* in every way, that is unfortunate, but necessary. If the outcome is equality, no one can say that it is unfair or excessive.

I hope that the school comes to the most moral and justifiable decision in this matter, and not just because of Title IX but because it is just, and I have been very proud to work here. If I seem like I feel very strongly about this it is because I do; I have seen how it can damage people to be treated like lesser citizens for reasons that are no fault of their own and it makes me very sad.

Heidi Reynolds Lower School Latin | 651.209.6320, ext. 220 | hreynolds@novaclassical.org

11/12/15

Dear friends on the Board of Directors,
"Free men read freely." I am a graduate of the great books program at St John's College in Annapolis Maryland where this phrase is our motto. I am a deep believer in human formation around the discussion of story. I have read the Princess Boy and would consider reading it to my children in this situation. However, I do wish the decision to remain mine. I request that the committee propose and the board approve a policy for our school that takes the risk involved in letting parents be the primary educators of their own children in the matter of human gender formation.

The risk, I think, is this: that parents will not embrace a common understanding of virtue, the understanding that seems to be required for civil peace. That risk is real, but the context of the decision here at Nova is that we are gathered around the cardinal virtues and when we ask parents to work together to love children, it is possible that they may pool their resources, the wisdom of their religious traditions, the books they have read, the experiences in life that have taught them empathy and compassion, so that even if they do not agree on how to talk about gender identity, the children of our school can feel safe and supported from different angles, for different reasons, but safe all the same. It is the risk of true diversity.

I want to befriend this young child and teach my children to do the same. I am very grateful for being given the information about this new situation at our school. I think Nova's practice of collaboration with parents and deference to their unique role with children strengthens the efficacy of all its education efforts. I agree that in a private or public setting, shame, rejection, humiliation and derision create many more problems than they "solve". By wishing to retain the decision about how to talk with my children about this matter, I do not disagree that this child needs help from every person around him to live out the freedom inherent in his humanity.

I do request that the school be clear in its policy formation as to whether or not they understand this issue of wearing the clothing of another gender is in fact an issue of sexuality. At the listening meeting, there seemed some confusion about whether or not we are talking about gender identity as a protected class. I think we are in fact talking about that and several other things and that we would do well to say so.

I accept the assumption that in a representative democracy the broad inclusion of all viewpoints is required. If sexuality is a private matter and if we follow the ancient Athenian leader Pericles in believing that civic greatness results from "keeping to ourselves" in private matters while in public matters, "we keep to the law", I understand that my own convictions about humanness, religious or otherwise, have only social, not legal, sway in this ongoing experiment called government.

I understand that our courts have named gender among race and religion as protected classes of human identity and I think of the desegregation policies in public schools in the 50s that followed Brown vs. Board of Education. I know that humans can be very slow to accept other people and that our government and its education arm in particular has a now long tradition of assuming that its role is to lead toward progress in that acceptance. I assume the lawsuit approach finds its inspiration from that tradition. But I have hope for a charter school that can retain its legal identity as authorized: to address the common goals of public education in a way different from the way other public school districts do so.

When faced with the claim that "The most important thing is that you're doing what makes you happy and that no one else should tell you who you really are or what's okay for you to like", we at Nova have access to the deep human tradition of cardinal virtue with which to consider that claim.

How does the claim in Mr William's statement "the most important thing is that you are doing what makes you happy" line up with exercising justice, temperance, fortitude and wisdom? What part of that claim fits with an environment of academic rigor and discipline?

Does it serve children to be told that the classical virtues themselves, to say nothing of parents or a religious tradition, cannot be understood to "tell you who you really are or what's okay for you to like"?

By forming the school as we have, we agree, I think, that such an approach to curriculum, school day expectations and homework standards does not serve a children well in the long run. It seems we disagree about how that approach to teaching children about understanding and expressing one's own sexuality may work. Can a classical charter school find a way to talk about respecting this family and its education of its child without telling our children that it is OK to do whatever makes them happy?

In the landscape of public education from its modern foundation in Napoleon's public education to the vision of it set forth by Thomas Jefferson, the common theme has been that citizens must be educated by the state in order to take part in the state's society. Outside of private education, religion has ever been only a convenient tool to that end. So the fact that, at Nova, I am asked to befriend and embrace a child acting upon the world as it is presented to him is not a problem to me. The fact that his world is presented to him in a way different from the way that I would present it to my own children is, in my view, a matter of conscience. It is to be expected in our society.

It does not follow in my mind however that it is best for our Nova school community with its classical vision to follow the progressive trend in adapting curriculum to meet the dynamic needs of social inclusion. On the contrary, I think the efficacy of our vision of education depends upon not doing so. Rather than making policy that addresses specific differences and defers to pleasure as the ultimate value, we must continue to seek to form a deep understanding of humanness drawn from the history of human inquiry and experience as we have it to this point. I think our best hope of common respect lies in this.

The question then seems to be how best to communicate to young children about what is asked of them by our democratic process on this or any other issue. I agree that books can be a very effective tool to that end. Children trust us, parents and teachers both, to give them story that will help them grow strong, able to see truth, make beauty and do goodness. We teach young children what to think and only slowly teach them how to think critically for themselves. Children's literature in particular is powerful to this end of saying: think this! see this! love this!

So what I request and recommend is that Nova form policy in response to the Safe and Supportive Schools act that:

1. retains focus on academic instruction in the school day
2. considers that if in our curriculum or school day a book like "My Princess Boy" might fit, we should articulate where it would be expected to fit and why with a specific statement of these things in the policy.
3. welcomes parents to submit books surrounding these emerging social inclusion issues that they have found helpful to a parent webpage or other resource devoted to the adult discourse surrounding these intimate things.
4. take the risk of trusting parents to willingly educate their children toward the virtues that we share in common including the inclusion of this child without removing the liberty we cherish to be able to keep private the discussion of private matters.
5. keeps curriculum instruction of virtue focused on common historical experience
6. accepts the challenge of observing the law fully while also exercising the liberty we are given to do so in a particular way, in a classical way.
7. clarifies for all involved at Nova exactly what process does in fact determine policies of this sort and observes with diligence the hard won policies already in place.

If we are to be taught by our own disciplined study of history to consider these issues of sexuality, the ancient world has much to say. But when asked to choose between his two lovers, Alcibiades or Philosophy, Socrates chose Philosophy because he believed that in pursuing what is true about reality by seeking out conversation with people who see things differently, rather than following pleasure or assuming that we know reality, we become "better, braver and less idle men". Ordering school-day discourse on virtuous behavior around common language that can be truly respectful of difference

requires courage but offers enduring strength to our community. It calls out the best that adults can give. And that is good for all students.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sarah DuMont Brown

Parent to Nova Students Daniel Brown, grade 6, Jonathan Brown, grade 4 and Chloe Brown, grade 2

On Thu, Nov 12, 2015 at 10:30 AM, Sarah Brown <sarahbrown29@gmail.com> wrote:

Good morning, Dr. Williams, Mr. Larson and Ms. Martinson,

Thank you for your work on behalf of our community.

I request that you consider amending some phrasing in your letter for Monday.

When faced with the claim from your third full paragraph that "The most important thing is that you're doing what makes you happy and that no one else should tell you who you really are or what's okay for you to like", we at Nova have access to the deep human tradition of cardinal virtue with which to consider that claim.

How does the claim "the most important thing is that you are doing what makes you happy" line up with exercising justice, temperance, fortitude and wisdom? What part of that claim fits with an environment of academic rigor and discipline?

Does it serve children to be told that the classical virtues themselves, to say nothing of parents or a religious tradition, cannot be understood to "tell you who you really are or what's okay for you to like"?

By forming the school as we have, we agree, I think, that such an approach to curriculum, school day expectations and homework standards does not serve children well in the long run. It seems we disagree about how that approach to teaching children about understanding and expressing one's sexuality may work. Can a classical charter school find a way to talk about respecting this family and its education of its child without telling all our children that it is OK to do whatever makes them happy?

Will you please consider amending that phrasing from your speech to give our children a more robust understanding of human responsibility and happiness? Something like the following might fit in what you have written:

In our American society and here at Nova, we agree that giving people freedom to be virtuous means giving them the freedom within some limits to decide how to be virtuous. Parents are given the big job of choosing how to guide their children. You as children are given the big job of learning to listen to your conscience and make good choices as you grow. We believe that freedom of conscience can prompt virtue. In this situation, that means...

If you see a girl that wears pants or a boy that wears a dress, remember that they are free to do these things. It's not okay, that is, it is not just in our society to say mean things to other people who might choose different activities than you, wear different clothes than you, or look different than you. It is not just in our society to make comments or laugh at someone because of what they are wearing.

What makes this world great is that showing virtue is satisfying and there are lots of different things we can do to express virtue. This is one of them.

If we as a community are serious about engendering classical virtue in our children, we should take this opportunity to couch our legal obligation in terms that we share as a community. I do not pretend that this issue is simple nor my suggestion perfect. But I truly believe that all people are most deeply satisfied when they are acting according to virtue.

I copy the board, the school climate chair, friends and some of the extraordinary teachers our children have been blessed with so as to invite conversation and share my hope for a long term path forward whatever your decision for Monday.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sarah DuMont Brown

11/12/15

Dear Members of the Nova School Board:

I am mom to a 2nd grader and 4th grader. I am a dedicated volunteer at Nova and firmly believe in its mission.

I also firmly believe that using materials such as My Princess Boy (or something similar) would help give a framework for discussion around gender non-conformity, would help our teachers discuss expectations for our scholars, and would serve to generate understanding and empathy for this child. School of Grammar students deal best with specific examples of behavior and specific examples of how to behave. General admonitions to “treat everyone the same” and “be nice” don’t give our kids what they need.

The use of My Princess Boy doesn’t circumvent the role of parents as primary educators; again, it serves as a springboard for discussion. It opens the conversation about being respectful of children who might not present themselves in ways our children expect, while still allowing for families to discuss at home what they believe as a family.

We have read the book as a family, had discussions about it, and used it as a springboard to talk about differences and acceptance; about things we can change about ourselves, and things that are just part of the way we are. These fruitful discussions broadened my girls' worldview and showed them another way to apply the virtues they learn in school to their everyday life. It is my belief that reading My Princess Boy (or something similar) to our Lower School students would have the same effect; it would show how the virtues could be applied in a new way.

I support the use of educational materials surrounding gender non-conforming and transgender individuals in our Lower School. I implore the School Board to accept this book as part of our anti-bullying program to make sure we are compliant with Title IX and the Safe and Supportive Schools Act and because it is, quite simply, the right thing to do.

Thank you for your time –

Robin Cerio

11/12/15

To the Board of Education:

I support Nova's administration's stand on welcoming and protecting all children. I support educating teachers, parents, and students about gender non-conforming situations that they may see. I believe students need to be taught what behaviors will be expected of them when they see a girl or boy dressed in a non-conforming manner. I realize that this is a new reality for most of us and that we all need to walk through this new reality together, one step at a time.

Pat Bodenstab *Grade 1 Teacher* | 651.209.6320, ext. 126 | pbodenstab@novaclassical.org

11/12/15

Dear Dr. Williams and Nova Administration,

Thank you for the invitation to respond again to this issue. As a parent of a 10th grader (Noah Olson) and a first graduating class graduate (Clare Olson), husband of an Educational Assistant—special ed in the lower school (Annette Olson), a weekly volunteer, I have much invested at Nova and am deeply grieved by both the process and end product of this decision.

As I shared the other night in the listening session, the thing I most love about Nova is that it is radical, not reactionary. By keeping our roots firmly in the soil of classical education, our school has thrived both educationally AND relationally. By acting reactionarily rather than responding radically, that fertile soil will be significantly eroded.

I do a lot of consulting with churches and non-profits and we often talk about the life cycle of an organization. That cycle has moved to a downward trend when nostalgia, then questioning, then polarization, and finally dropout begin to occur. This part of the life cycle has already begun in our Nova community. The temptation is always to go for the “quick fix,” adjusting goals, objectives, structures, policies, etc. whereas the true fix is always to return to and rediscover and re-articulate the original dream and vision. That is the radical solution.

At Nova that dream and vision has many facets—strong adherence to the virtues, deep respect for parents as primary educators of their children and full collaborators in the implementation of curriculum, policy, and procedures, etc., a focus first on my responsibility before asserting my rights, and a pedagogy which focuses on teaching children how to think, not what to think (this requires particular care in the Grammar Stage as children are still developing and are so black and white in their thinking. I am deeply concerned about how this non-gender conforming label will impact not only this one child, but the other children as well in this early development stage. If this issue is to be addressed, it should be no sooner than the School of Logic, or even better, the School of Rhetoric, when students would be much more capable of nuanced thinking and vigorous discourse). This has enabled us to maintain unity in the midst of our diversity with a common understanding that this is our school, and not about us and them or yours and mine.

This whole process and the corresponding end product has not only eroded our soil, but has taken an ax to our roots. My understanding is that this is not a Title IX required response, and by acceding to the pressures to focus on a particularity rather than a principle, a very damaging precedent is being set. My grief is not primarily about this single issue per se, but rather how this issue has been used to violate our dream and vision as a classical school. The consequences of this violation have the potential to be very far-reaching.

As a leader of a very complex non-profit myself, I understand well the challenges of leading in a diverse community. I know that these decisions are extraordinarily difficult. Our family prays regularly for the school. We desire to be fully supportive and positively constructive. Though it seems that there is no recourse left, I would humbly ask you to reconsider this process and product in light of its reactionary nature, and guide us back to our radical roots.

Sincerely,

Rev. Dr. Jim Olson

11/12/15

Dear Members of the Nova School Board:

This letter is in regard to Dr. Eric Williams and his performance thus far in the school year. As you will conduct his performance review later on this year, I wanted to give some feedback.

Dr. Williams is doing a wonderful job for Nova! His leadership skills are serving us well during our current situation, and his level demeanor is a blessing. He is forthright, and is a great example for our students on how the each of the virtues are applied in everyday life. His wealth of experience helps us tap into resources we didn't know were there, and the kids love it when he goes out on the playground to play four square. He is down-to-earth and practical, yet willing to make the hard choices when push comes to shove.

I couldn't be happier with Dr. Williams at the helm. He, along with the other accomplished members of our leadership team, will continue to help Nova thrive and grow.

Sincerely,

Robin Cerio

11/13/15

Dear Dr. Williams and Ms. Tousignant,

I am writing to show my support for the use of a book or material like the poem to be read on Monday to teach about acceptance and understanding. Whenever a child is being bullied or at risk, I support the school in educating children about differences and acceptance all around and in this case for gender non-conforming individuals.

I am a mom of all girls and my daughters have shopped in the boy's section for Thomas the Train, Star Wars, Superman, etc. clothing and toys. They have also bought and worn backpacks and shoes from the boy's section without comment or incident. I hope that boys can feel the same freedom without fear of reprisal.

As a female in a traditional male field, I have experienced similar bias throughout the years. On the first day of my first mechanical engineering class, the boy in front of me turned around and told me that I was in the wrong class. I am thankful for the women who came before me and paved the way for me to pursue my career of choice. I hope that in a similar way we can help support our children to break gender roles and to understand differences including gender non-conformity.

I have been impressed during my conversations with the new administration. I support the staff in helping children feel supported, safe, and successful.

Best Regards,

Kimberly Dumitrica

11/13/15

Mr. Williams and Nova School Board,

Our family has attended Nova for 12 years. During this time we have appreciated the rigorous academic environment and classical curriculum. I don't see how teaching on gender identity fits into a classical curriculum, especially at this stage of life. There is a period of formation that needs to take place in every person's life. I think the topic of gender identity could be addressed later in the School of Rhetoric when a person is more developed in their identity.

Our kids have been taught in the home to respect every person that God has created, both male and female. We teach our children to be thinkers and not fall into the cultural relativism of society. We do not teach our kids that they can do or think whatever they want to be happy as that is not a virtuous way to live. Rather, we teach them to sacrifice and put others first, which is not always easy and comfortable. Doing whatever makes you happy is a hedonistic way to live. It does not teach the virtues of discipline and self-control. This world view is contrarian to our world view and undermines the authority of the parent with respect to teaching on personal identity and morality.

Given the current climate at Nova, we are opting our children out of any teaching that goes against the natural order of gender identity on the 16th and any other teaching on this topic on some future date.

We all have differences. We recognize them and respect them but we don't need to call attention to them and celebrate them as a school. If that were the case each child should have a poem day to recognize and celebrate their differences.

Respectfully,

David Bursey

davidbursey@outlook.com

11/15/15

Liz Palmer
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West St Paul, MN 55118
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November 11, 2015
Nova's Directors, Administrators, Faculty, Staff and Parents
1455 Victoria Way
St. Paul, MN 55102
651.209.6320

Dear Members of the Nova Community,

We find ourselves at a crucial time in the life of this Academy. One of our own has been treated poorly by our own and the correction that needs to take place is not as simple as an apology. To correct this wrong, a deep look must be taken at the ways that we empower our students who encounter discrimination, at the language that we use when we talk about one another, at the processes that we should have in place for access to support whenever it is needed and by whomever it is needed.

Tonight, I searched the website to identify our present Title IX Coordinator. I could not find any information on it. This does not mean that it is not there, but it does mean that it is not as visible as it needs to be.

Several years ago, one of our daughters disclosed that a teacher was having a sexual relationship with a student at Nova. That teacher is gone, and the student is gone but the legacy remains.

The climate at Nova, at that time, was such that many students knew, some adults suspected, others may have known, and yet nothing was done about it for a full year. Checks and balances were not in place to ensure that students would not be in precarious positions with adult teachers. Rules were not established to create proper boundaries around communications between students and teachers or administrators. Language was not given to students prior to, nor following this lengthy period of sexual misconduct perpetrated by an employee of the Academy against a student. No curriculum was built to correct this wrong. No access to support was clearly laid out. No processes were established to ensure that our community could recover well. Nothing was done to acknowledge it, to learn from it, to heal from it, to help to ensure that it would never happen again. Those affected were asked to cope in silence. They were told to keep quiet. The wounds from that time are still not entirely healed.

Many protected classes have been wrongly treated here and have had nowhere to turn for help. I know of instances of religious discrimination, sexual discrimination, sexual harassment, sexual violence, hostile environments, racial discrimination, lack of accommodation for students with disabilities, on and on, which have occurred within this community. The time to fix this is now.

Never, I can assert with certainty, never has there been a purposeful, planned avenue laid out to the community for access to support and appropriate process to deal with issues of this sort. That is a tragedy.

Often times in history, one event can trigger a transformation. My hope is that we are at such a point in Nova's history. Empowering our students to be well educated in order to be virtuous is what we are to be about.

The virtues, Justice, Temperance, Prudence and Fortitude, guide our students toward tolerance, kindness, and respect. The curriculum that is proposed is in full support of that. While the issue of gender identity may not be one that you foresee any personal involvement with, other vulnerabilities may be present for you and, or, your children. Issues around rights concern us all.

Please let us not be distracted by our fears or discomforts as we face this new chapter in our development. Those who are afraid that religious values are being challenged need to take comfort in the language that is being used in the script and poem that are being shared in classrooms. The shaping that is proposed, highlights values which we all have already confirmed as we chose this academy: to act justly while being guided by temperance and prudence and propelled by fortitude.

Please let us ask questions before we jump to conclusions. Let us be guided by a pursuit of truth, goodness and beauty instead of being driven by fear. Let us imagine ourselves in the situation that this family finds themselves in. Let us er on the side of kindness and compassion. Enough unanswered wrongs have taken place in this community. Let this be a new model for building processes and systems which keep all members of this community safe and able to feed and be fed by the mission of Nova.

With gratitude,
Liz Palmer

11/15/15

To Mr. Williams, Ms. Brodeur, and the Nova Board:

I am writing as a Nova Parent (Emmet Tanzer-Tragatsch, 7th Grader) in strong support of measures to ensure that students be protected from bullying and any attempts to single them out unnecessarily. It is the primary responsibility of the board, school administration, teaching and support staff, and not just the students and their parents, to ensure that the Nova is a safe, welcoming, and respectful place for all students.

In the case of students who identify themselves as gay, lesbian, bisexual, and especially gender nonconforming, the vulnerability to abuse or being singled out is especially high. As such, the school has a particularly strong obligation to ensure the full inclusion of these students.

I understand and strongly support the desire of many that the school be proactive to ensure that this goal is met. However, I have serious reservations concerning the use of the specific book, *My Princess Boy*, as a means to achieve this important objective. The book is written by an author who is making a well-meaning and sincere effort to encourage others to show greater understanding and sensitivity toward those who do not identify with their birth gender. But at the same time she does so by perpetuating some very unfortunate gender stereotypes. Girls aspire to be princesses, who obsess about tiaras, pretty "girly" colors, pink above all, clothing, bags, jewelry and other accessories. To be a boy is about doing things, being active, especially being active playing sports like baseball and soccer, not frivolous girly stuff.

Fifteen years into the 21st century, I'm not sure this sort of thing needs to be part of the education of an impressionable, elementary school student.

Thank you to all of you for the service you do on behalf of the Nova community.

René Tragatsch

rtragatsch@gmail.com

[612-460-8215](tel:612-460-8215)

11/15/15

Hi,

I am the father of eight children, 5 of which are Nova Students. Either my wife or I would have attended the recent meeting about anti-bullying curriculum, had we not been caring for our latest child who was born seven weeks premature just 1 week ago (she is doing fine).

I wanted to be sure to express our feedback on a few things.

1) we have always been pleased with Nova's receptiveness to parent feedback. And are concerned that things may not be so parent-focused as before.

a) we were pleased with how Nova resolved a sex education dispute with parents back in 2010 or 2011. A two track system was put in place allowing for parental choice in such a sensitive topic. Also the sex education primarily takes place in the upper school (school of rhetoric) which we believe is more appropriate.

b) I am concerned that the current gender education curriculum dispute has not been forthrightly handled. I sent an email to Eric Williams with no reply by him, asking for clarification on what books will be read to children whos parents opt them out of the gender education on Monday. I received no reply although I heard from other parents that there are books being read to children. Again, as a parent, I would want to know what books will be used in case my children have questions.

2) we have prized highly Nova's emphasis on both character education (virtues) and emphasis on teaching facts using the classical education model.

a) we enjoy phonics and logic and Latin

b) we think that virtues certainly help in dealing with bullying for which we stand firmly against.

c) such virtues invite a religious clientel to the school - families with strong moral values who affirm the classical virtures have enrolled their children with Nova and trust that the school will operate with a mind to classic education and traditional morality.

d) I don't have to inform the school leadership that transgenderism is a behavior and thought mentality that is novel and only lately approved of in common culture. I have no ill will to any transgender people. But it is foolish to assume that such behavior is normal and should not raise any eyebrows. For children to find such things either alarming or strange is natural. Parents should help children treat everyone with respect. But to educate my children that such behavior is to be so approved of that the entire Nova school body must behave like this is classical moral viture, is absurd. Someone can be different and should be respected. But different is not the norm, and it is okay to have cultural norms that those who choose to be different will have to navigate.

3) the book My Princess Boy, has a clear pro-trans-gender agenda. I worry that my kindergartener would have innocently laughed at some of the discussion in that book as funny, and she should be forgiven since these ideas are so different and so unusual when speaking with a classical perspective.

a) I am most alarmed that had a parent not spoken up, this book would have been read with virtually no advance warning - at least that is my impression.

b) no exceptions were provided initially to accomodate parents who may understandably object.

c) I am thankful that the school administration eventually took this off the table, but the forced gender education being provided Monday is still an overreach.

4) The initial email about this said that Nova has always stood for inclusivity. I do not know if that is the case. I thought they stood for historic cultural virtues.

5) I am also concerned that this agenda driven change in policies and gender education - which by the way goes beyond the sex education decisions addressed a few years ago, I am concerned this will lead to bathroom changes which may put my daughters at risk from leud boys who weasel their way into a girls bathroom. There needs to be careful protections in place for biological girls and boys in keeping them separate and safe. I hope you would agree.

6) I will be opting our kids out of the gender education session on Monday. I will be sending forms with them to school. We would have made this decision sooner had we had time to think as we are battling illness and caring for our preemie daughter. I do hope our decision is respected.

7) Perhaps the new director and principals who have been hired are bringing with them a non-classical approach to education, that sees public opinion polls as the barometer to measure the classroom with. I surely hope that is not what will happen to my children should I choose to keep them in this institution.

8) Finally, know that as a parent in Minnesota I have the right to opt-out my children of anything I choose and have the right to review all materials that will be presented to my children. ([Parental Curriculum Review; Statute 120.20 B](#) and [Nova Policy 502](#)).

Sincerely,

Bob & Carolyn Hayton

parents of: Emily, Megan, Amber, Rachel and Bethany Hayton

11/16/15

Dear Members of the Nova Board,

I'm the parent of three Nova students and I wholeheartedly support Dr. Williams' efforts in providing Lower School students with information about gender identity. I also fully support any additions to the anti-bullying curriculum that address gender non-conformity.

It's vital for all parents to understand that despite their personal beliefs, this is a legal issue that Nova must address. I commend Dr. Williams for laying that out so clearly in the email he sent to parents last week.

I hope it's not too late to prove to the gender non-conforming student, his/her family, and the community at large that Nova is a warm and welcoming place. While most of us at don't understand what this family is going through, I hope we can still show that we're willing to learn and be supportive, so that the family feels that they are welcome and they do belong.

Thank you,

Julianna Hofeld

11/17/15

The Nova Board of Directors and Eric Williams, Executive Director,

There are three issues I'd like to address:

1) A possible solution as to what uniforms are worn is simply that boys wear a boy's uniform and girls wear a girl's uniform. The current Nova uniform policy (as found on the Nova website) states that a boy is required to wear a boy's uniform. This would eliminate the fear that a child might be teased for wearing the opposite sex uniform. It would also eliminate a major distraction for other students.

According to the Nova Uniform policy on the Nova website:

"The purpose of the uniform policy is two-fold. First it is functional: to minimize distraction and focus students' attention on their work at school rather than their attire, and to project a unified school image, which is proper and neat in appearance, reflecting the important nature of our enterprise."

Under general guidelines of the Nova uniform policy states in part:

Visible tattoos are not allowed.

Hairstyle and hair color must not draw undue attention or be distracting in the classroom environment.

Makeup and nail polish must be minimal and modest, not excessive or distracting.

The uniform policy states girls may wear leggings. It does **not** say boys may wear leggings.

Winter Leg Wear Option with Skirts:

Girls may wear black, white, or gray ankle-length leggings with a white or matching colored sock.

The dress code for K-5 in part states for a girl to wear a Girl's Jumper the **girl** must wear dark solid bike shorts, and tights/leggings are required under the jumper.

2) The policy states "Any exceptions to these uniform guidelines, including assignment of non-uniform days, will be made at the discretion of the Nova Administration".

The Nova Administration does have the discretion to allow an exception. I would understand for religious reasons a child might wear a head covering. For a child to wear clothing of the opposite gender is a preference, not a necessity.

Any child wearing a uniform of the opposite sex would be a distraction to many other students. The same way excessive jewelry and tattoos would be.

Having children follow the dress code already in place would have eliminated this uproar at Nova.

3) In addition, Nova policy should include that boys use the boys bathroom and/or locker room and the girls use the girls bathroom and/or locker room for all grades (K-12). This would be inclusive in that it would include all students at Nova. This would eliminate some possibilities of teasing or bullying. This would also make it easier for teachers and/or students to determine if a student is using an incorrect bathroom. It would also respect the privacy of all students.

Daniel Hackenmueller