



**NEWS**

# **After CRT complaint, Huntsville teacher training investigated by Alabama state officials**

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**Whitesburg Elementary**

22 hours ago



The faculty here at Whitesburg Elementary is putting forth much effort to have hard conversations during PD making sure that ALL students feel welcome, heard, supported, and most importantly a sense of belonging. We take pride in continuously working to close achievement gaps and celebrate all the diverse learners we have! #LionFamily #HCS



Screenshot of Whitesburg Elementary post. AL.com



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The Alabama State Department of Education is investigating the first known complaint under a new rule that restricts teachers from instructing students in “ideologies that promote one race or sex over another.”



Huntsville schools has said that the subject of the complaint, a teacher training at an elementary school, did not contain critical race theory. An official also said at one point that stopping the school from conducting anti-discrimination training might violate orders from a federal judge as the school manages a desegregation case.

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In November, Huntsville parent Adam Stephens contacted state board member Wayne Reynolds after seeing a post from Whitesburg Elementary on social media in November showing materials used in a teacher training session.



The school posted photos of writings on whiteboards with the headings of “discrimination,” “racism,” and “equity,” and the caption, “The faculty here at Whitesburg Elementary is putting forth much effort to have hard conversations during PD making sure that ALL students feel welcome, heard, supported, and most important a sense of belonging. We take pride in continuously working to close achievement gaps and celebrate all the diverse learners we have.” The post has since been removed.

According to photos circulated in several conservative social media groups, the teacher training in the district also included several PowerPoint slides that discussed concepts of racism and white privilege.

Stephens, who has a child at Whitesburg Middle and believes teachers there may also have attended identical training, said he believes the training violates a new state rule. The state board passed a rule this fall that aims to restrict teachers potentially teaching “divisive” topics that promote one race or sex above another.

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The topic popped up this summer after conservative news organizations and writers claimed critical race theory is being taught to children in K-12 schools around the country, typically referring not to the academic theory but to broader anti-bias or diversity efforts. Critical race theory is not taught in K-12 schools, state superintendent Eric Mackey told board members in July.

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Stephens said he doesn't think the district should use the training materials.

"We don't need people to be treated differently based upon their race," he said. "That's what we want to get rid of."

"In the social environment that we're in right now, I don't think that I'm going out on a limb saying that straight white people are kind of targeted in a lot of ways."

There is no clear process for resolving complaints under the new rule, but state officials say they have now contacted Huntsville schools for more information. Huntsville Superintendent Christie Finley previously told Reynolds, the state board member, that the Whitesburg training "is a training per Consent Order and not a violation of state law."

Huntsville City Schools operates under a 1963 federal desegregation order but has been working to meet requirements to end court oversight.

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In an emailed response to AL.com, a Huntsville City Schools spokesperson said the school board attorney is working with the Alabama State Department of Education to review of the issue.

Board attorney Chris Pape in an emailed response to Stephens Friday evening, said the materials do not violate the state board rule and that training materials were for culturally responsive training, a method of teaching that tries to recognize and accommodate students' different backgrounds and cultures

"As a resident of Madison County," Pape wrote, "I'm sure you understand that students in a diverse district like HCS encounter these types of current event issues frequently, and HCS wants to ensure that its faculty is able to respond to questions that students have about these topics in an informed, professional manner."

The lawyer said that the district wants to distinguish between culturally responsive training, which it said it utilizes in teacher professional development, and critical race theory, which does not impact student instruction.

“This particular portion of this training was focused on ‘potential’ vocabulary and definitions that teachers may encounter from students and were not intended to be used as instructional materials for students,” Pape wrote.

Stephens told AL.com the attorney’s response did not relieve his concerns.

“It reads to me like I’m sorry we got caught,” Stephens said Friday evening. He said he will wait to see what the state department attorney determines.

Stephens said he believes people of all races should be treated equally and the Whitesburg materials do not promote equal treatment of all people.

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“Anything that leads to favoring one race, any race, over another or devaluing any race over another is something that, in my opinion, doesn’t belong in the school,” he said.

Stephens said while the training was for teachers and the materials were not discussed with students, it will ultimately impact students.

“It would take an incredibly naive person,” Stephens said, “to think that you’re going to train teachers on something and it’s not going to make its way into the classroom in some way or share of form.”

Reynolds told AL.com he was getting complaints from constituents that critical race theory was being taught in public schools, but Stephens was the first to provide an example, and he wanted the state to investigate and resolve any conflicts between its policy and the federal desegregation order.

“I don’t know what the federal court order says,” he said. “I don’t know when it was done. I don’t know what [Huntsville City Schools] promised.”

In the response to Stephens, Pape did not mention the desegregation order.

State Department of Education general counsel Jason Swann told AL.com Thursday the department is waiting on a response from Huntsville school officials.

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Swann emailed Stephens Thursday evening, writing, “As with any other inquiry of this nature, I have contacted the district and requested an explanation and response to your concerns. I will let you know as soon as I receive a response.”

Stephens said he doesn’t believe in whitewashing history and wants Alabama’s history to be accurately taught to students, including segregation and slavery, which Stephens called “horrible” and “awful.”