


Southern Poverty Law Center education materials surprisingly common in red states, probe finds

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Probe finds vast majority of SPLC resources embedded in state, local and other educational entities are publicly posted on their websites. Smithsonian tells 10-year-olds to fight white privilege.

Some school districts appear to go to great lengths to hide curricula, psychological interventions and which adults have access to students, even invoking copyright law and forcing parents to navigate state and federal courts to bring an open-records lawsuit.

They don't seem as reticent to hide their outsourcing of curricular decisions to a progressive group that went from fighting the Ku Klux Klan to allegedly funding the Klan's progeny to create the appearance of a thriving white supremacy movement and thereby goose its fundraising and swing Southern elections.

Nearly 200 school districts and 30 "state government entities" in 42 states and D.C. advertise their incorporation of the Southern Poverty Law Center's curriculum, originally called Teaching Tolerance but renamed Learning for Justice in 2021 because "tolerance is not justice," according to an investigation by parental rights advocacy group Defending Ed.

The appendix to the report includes hundreds of links to SPLC-related resources in educational organizations nationwide, though it emphasizes some come from past years and may not reflect current practices.

Just the News counted about 30 hosted on Defending Ed's own website – meaning the documentation isn't necessarily public – and the rest hosted by districts, state departments of education, school board associations, teachers unions and other professional organizations, confirming that they publicly tout their SPLC connections.

Until its federal indictment for wire fraud this spring, SPLC was better known for putting mainstream conservative groups on its "hate map" even while individually identifying several as simply "anti-government," including the late Charlie Kirk's Turning Point USA, Defending Ed and several Moms for Liberty chapters.

The map identifies several others as "anti-LGBTQ," including the religious liberty legal powerhouse Alliance Defending Freedom, homosexual child welfare group Gays Against

Groomers and evangelical Family Research Council, whose appearance on the hate map prompted a terrorist attack on its D.C. headquarters in 2013.

Smithsonian tells 10-year-olds to actively oppose white privilege

The SPLC curriculum is seeded throughout "teacher professional development and trainings, classroom lessons, district-wide curriculums, Social Emotional Learning (SEL), social justice standards, and district antiracism and equity policies and resources," the report states.

Red states are not exempt from using SPLC resources – in their department of education (Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas, Idaho, Indiana, Mississippi, Nebraska and North Dakota); school boards association (Alaska, Oklahoma); principals association (Kentucky), and parent teacher association (Utah).

Two or more districts in several red-leaning states use SPLC resources: Alaska, Arizona, Florida, Georgia, Iowa, Missouri, North Carolina, Ohio and Texas.

"The content often pushes or reinforces far-left cultural and political ideologies such as left-wing activism, anti-racism, Black Lives Matter, gender ideology and queer theory, white privilege, white supremacy, whiteness, and transgenderism," according to Defending Ed.

For example, the fall 2018 issue of Teaching Tolerance – whose domain Tolerance.org now redirects to SPLC's Learning for Justice subdomain – first explains white privilege, then says it must be actively opposed, because simply acknowledging white privilege "can be harmful and counterproductive."

The white privilege explainer is common on school district diversity, equity and inclusion sites, according to the report, including suburban Philadelphia's Springfield Township, which also links to Learning for Justice's "One World" posters that can be printed and posted in school.

Both Teaching Tolerance and Learning for Justice are recommended by name for fourth-graders in the congressional chartered Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of the American Indian.

"To build a multiracial inclusive democracy requires educating for liberation and civic and political participation across the South and the nation," Learning for Justice says.

The National Sex Education Standards, produced by a progressive coalition rather than a federal entity but adopted by 41% of school districts according to its 2020 second edition, say they were "informed" by SPLC's Social Justice Standards. Its "contributors and reviewers" include a school programs coordinator for Teaching Tolerance.

Standards may be hidden in other curricula, teachers' lessons, 'equity audits'

Described as "a road map for anti-bias education at every stage of K-12 instruction" but apparently designed to create school-aged Spartacuses through "collective action," the Social Justice Standards explicitly promote identity politics and intersectionality, which assigns value to individuals based on how many purportedly marginalized identities they can claim.

One example from "9-12 Grade Level Outcomes and Scenarios" shares a student's "personal mission statement" that she will "celebrate all of my in-group and out-group identities and work to understand how they overlap to make up who I am as an individual."

The American School Counselor Association's "Student Standards: Mindsets & Behaviors" names the Social Justice Standards as one of 10 "primary resources that informed" its standards. The only other ideological resource appears to be the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning's SEL Core Competencies.

ASCA's "Crosswalk" lays out the Social Justice Standards in detail, from identity politics and intersectionality, to recognizing "biased speech" and systemic injustice, to their obligation to "stand up to exclusion, prejudice and injustice" and "carry out collective action" against it.

The investigation likely underestimates the reach of SPLC content "due to a lack of public access to curriculums, lessons, and textbooks," the report says. The Social Justice Standards in particular may be integrated into "several popular SEL curriculums."

Teachers can also incorporate the content into lessons and assignments of their own volition, making SPLC's influence harder to suss out, the report says. It flags a Minnesota Teacher of the Year semifinalist who said she incorporated social justice and SEL standards into her lessons because education itself is otherwise a "system of oppression."

The standards can also be "promoted by outside consultants via equity audits," as seen in the Equity Institute's audit of Rhode Island's North Providence School District, or by teachers unions, as with the American Federation of Teachers training members on how to work them into lessons.

Defending Ed didn't answer queries on what legal hurdles it has faced to obtain SPLC-inflected material, such as copyright claims, teachers union threats or exorbitant cost estimates.