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February 7, 2025

Lincoln School Committee  
135 Old River Road  
PO Box 367  
Lincoln, RI 02865

VIA EMAIL

Dear School Committee Members:

At your meeting on Monday, a second reading is scheduled on a proposed policy governing “Display of Materials/Flags on School Property.” We recognize the lateness of this letter, but since this policy was just brought to our attention, we wanted to share with you some comments we have upon a quick reading of it. We hope that, notwithstanding the timing, you will consider those comments, offered below, as we believe the policy is somewhat confusing and could lead to disputes as to its legitimate reach, something of particular concern in light of its potential impact on First Amendment rights.

- Although the policy’s focus is on the “display” of materials, the definition of “posted material” includes literature and leaflets that are “distributed” to students. (Section II.) In theory, this could apply to material handed out by a teacher in their class or birthday invitations distributed by a student to their classmates, all of whom would need a determination by the principal as to its appropriateness before distributing it.

- Section III(1) designates the principal as the person responsible for making the determination of what is allowable to be posted. However, this same section gives any staff person the authority to “immediately remove” posted materials that violate the policy, meaning that they can unilaterally decide themselves what is and is not an appropriate posting.

- Materials must “directly relate” to the community’s cultural, recreational, artistic, or educational opportunities,” but they also must relate to the student’s curriculum. Section III(2). Thus, if a flyer relates to a cultural or educational opportunity in the community, but it is not curriculum-related (or vice versa), it apparently could not be displayed as this policy is written. It is unclear to us if that is the policy’s goal.

- The policy purports to support the desire of students and others to display materials that “express student opinion.” (Section I.) But if, as Section III(2) declares, displays can’t promote any “political or socio-political interest,” it is unclear to us what meaningful opinions are left for students to display.

- Using a vague standard, Section III(3) bars any displays that are “likely to impact” the “safety, schedule, work or discipline of the school.” This would seem to prevent the posting of, say, anti-drug posters or pleas for good attendance, which are designed to impact school discipline.

- The policy contains an exception for curriculum-related classroom displays, but not, as far as we can tell, for displays in places like a teachers’ lounge, even though the policy appears to apply to both students and faculty at the school. (Section III(4)).

I understand that a few other school districts may have already adopted a policy like this. But in light of the ambiguities and questions cited above about the proposal’s scope and reach, including its potential impact in some circumstances on the exercise of First Amendment rights, we urge the committee to postpone the second reading of this policy in order to consider amending it to address some of the issues we have raised in this letter.

Thank you in advance for considering our views, and again, I am sorry that this letter is reaching you so late in the process.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Steven Brown".

Steven Brown  
Executive Director

cc: Dr. Lawrence Filippelli, Superintendent  
Benjamin Scungio