

House Education Committee  
House Bill 155  
May 19<sup>th</sup>, 2025

Chair Fowler Arthur, Vice Chair Odioso, Ranking Member Robinson, and members of the House Education Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on House Bill 155. My name is Rose Ioppolo. I'm a public school substitute teacher, a member of the Mentor Board of Education, and a parent of four public school students, two of whom have recently graduated.

I am writing to express my support in prohibiting Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) in K-12 schools.

While DEI may be well-intentioned, there is no solid evidence that it reduces bias, increases diversity, or improves academic outcomes for marginalized students. DEI often frames white students as oppressors and black students as victims, fostering division at a very young age, and discouraging the belief that success comes from personal effort. It promotes equal outcomes—something that can't be achieved without discrimination. DEI has had ample time to demonstrate results—and it hasn't lived up to its promises. Schools should return their focus to academics and the values that unite us—not the narratives that divide us.

DEI initiatives focus on supporting students in marginalized groups, based on the belief that these students face barriers in education that their white peers do not face. However, according to State and Federal laws, every student—regardless of background—is given equal opportunity to succeed. That is not due to DEI. Students are protected because of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Title IX of the Educational Amendments of 1972, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Americans with Disabilities Act, the Equal Educational Opportunities Act of 1974, Every Student Succeeds Act, the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment of the US Constitution, and our own State code and Constitution. These existing laws already protect all students equally—DEI adds no new protection. Instead, it teaches black children they are victims and white children they are oppressors, fostering division by emphasizing differences over shared values and potential.

I spend a lot of time in K–5 classrooms in schools that don't practice DEI. I've seen how easily kids of all ethnicities and backgrounds make friends—just by sitting at the same table or sharing interests. It's simple and natural. But for children who attend schools that

push DEI, that changes. It teaches children that one of them is an oppressor and the other a victim, based just on skin color. That's a heavy and unfair message for young minds. It's especially sad when students of color are told that no matter how hard they work, they will need special advantages to succeed. That doesn't inspire effort—it takes away the will to try.

Kids don't come up with these ideas on their own—DEI introduces them. When white students repeatedly see their Black classmates receiving special treatment, it can lead to confusion, frustration, and eventually resentment. Ironically, this can create the very division and bias DEI claims to prevent.

One example of why I have concerns with DEI in K-12 is the divisive content in some of the books that are in our school libraries and K-5 classroom collections. The book "*Colin Kaepernick: From Free Agent to Change Agent*" is in all 5th grade classrooms for silent reading. It discusses police brutality, promotes Black Lives Matter, and labels Trump voters as racists or white nationalists. In my district, where 60% of voters supported President Trump, this book risks creating unnecessary division between children and their families. By unfairly labeling Trump supporters as racists or white nationalists, it can cause children to question or mistrust their parents' values and beliefs. This kind of messaging not only misrepresents many families but also fosters confusion and conflict at home, undermining the trust that should exist between students and their parents.

Most elementary students can't reliably tell facts from opinion, which is why many parents worry about political indoctrination in schools. Despite strong community opposition, our liberal board chose to keep this book, and other books with heavy topics. Even after President Trump's executive order banning DEI in schools, my district refuses to remove it—claiming it's not part of the curriculum, even though the board approved it as such. House Bill 155 would close this loophole and protect our young students from biased influences.

DEI determines how schools handle discipline. In 2018, Ohio mandated Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) to promote safer, more consistent school environments and to reduce disparities in student discipline. While PBIS was not originally a DEI initiative, it is now implemented through a DEI lens in most districts. Despite these efforts, the results are discouraging. Research from Miami University and state data from the 2022–23 school year show that disciplinary disparities persist: Black male students in Ohio are still 4.3 times more likely than white male students to be suspended or expelled, and Black female students are six times more likely than white females to face similar punishment. Our own district's data mirrors these state-level trends.

These numbers raise an important question: if PBIS and DEI are meant to reduce disparities, why haven't outcomes improved? The answer may lie in the way DEI reframes discipline—shifting the focus from consistent expectations to identity-based interventions. Instead of treating students equally, DEI-based discipline emphasizes differences, often lowering expectations for certain groups under the assumption that disparities are rooted solely in systemic bias. But this approach can backfire, unintentionally creating new forms of inequity, undermining accountability, and contributing to continued behavioral issues.

Rather than helping students succeed, this model often protects them from the very structure and consequences that foster personal growth. As a result, DEI risks amplifying the very divisions it claims to solve—focusing on identity over responsibility, and disparity over discipline.

My district uses Restorative Practices, shaped by DEI principles, to discipline students. This approach considers cultural background and avoids uniform consequences—meaning marginalized students often receive conversations in place of disciplinary action. While well-intended, it contradicts our Student Code of Conduct, which is supposed to apply equally to all. In practice, white students are more likely to face formal discipline, while marginalized students are shielded from accountability. This not only undermines fairness but may explain why discipline disparities persist. Many educators across Ohio are quietly expressing doubt, as the promised benefits of these approaches rarely materialize.

Rather than tying student behavior to race, we should consider the influence of home environments. Students of all backgrounds who lack consistent discipline at home are often the ones repeatedly violating the Student Code of Conduct—a point many educators frequently raise. When students lack consistent structure or discipline at home, schools become one of the only places where they can learn accountability, self-control, and respect for rules. This makes it even more critical for schools to uphold clear, fair, and consistently enforced behavior standards, and House Bill 155 will make this mandatory. Without that structure, we risk reinforcing instability and missing a key opportunity to help all students—especially those who need it most—develop the skills they need to succeed in life.

In 2021, it was revealed that my district spent \$400,000 on mandatory DEI training for certified staff—without board approval or transparency with taxpayers. The training encouraged teachers to become “co-conspirators” in fighting racism and systemic injustice; issues not shown to exist in our district. It included an “Anti-Racist Scale,” asking staff to reflect on statements like: “I identify how I may unknowingly benefit from racism,” and “I yield positions of power to those otherwise marginalized.” The training claimed that our curriculum is “rooted in whiteness” and that “standard English is oppressive”. This

divisive training created a hostile work environment for our staff and was only stopped after a significant community backlash. Unfortunately, no formal directive was issued to staff to cease using its practices—so it's likely some are still in place.

Not only will House Bill 155 protect educators and students from having this type of divisive rhetoric forced upon them, but it will allow for a safe way for staff, parents, and students to report alleged violations of the law.

As a board member, I hear from many parents and staff members—and not once have I received positive feedback about DEI in our schools. They are more focused on what truly matters: safety, discipline, academic achievement, and responsible spending. DEI claims to solve problems that don't exist in our K-12 system, yet it delivers no measurable benefit. It's time to get back to basics and treat every student equally, without dividing them by race or identity.

Respectfully submitted,

**Rose Ioppolo**

**Mentor Exempted Village School District**

Lake County, Ohio