

WHAT HAPPENED WITH THE CURRICULUM ADVISORY COUNCIL?

After we met with the Davidson principal in June, we submitted the matter to the Curriculum Advisory Council (CAC). In late September, a week before the meeting, we were given a list of CAC members but were discouraged by the district from communicating with them individually. We prepared packets for each council member containing much of the information that is now on our websites.

The first of two meetings took place on September 28th. As the panel was introduced, it turned out that only two were parents, one of whom worked at San Rafael High. So out of 19 members, only one was independent of the district, and there was no Davidson parent representation at all. According to district documents, the CAC is “composed of administrators, teachers, and parents representing each school in the district”.

At the session, *The Bronze Bow* was on the agenda as an “information item”, meaning that the council received public comments and any submitted written information and asked questions as needed. We handed out copies of state regulations, state textbook edits related to the book’s biases, and important passages from the book itself. Four different members of our group each spoke on a different aspect of the issue.

Several members of the public also spoke, all opposed to the book. One of them, Douglas Huneke, a Presbyterian minister and authority on Christian-Jewish issues, pointed out how it subtly, dangerously and carelessly elevates Christianity and devalues Judaism (see “**Letters of support**”, on this website). One Davidson teacher and the Davidson principal spoke in favor of the book. They ignored all the key issues we had raised, focusing instead on the provocative charge of “book banning” (the principal compared us to neo-Nazis offended by *The Diary of Anne Frank*). They said nothing about the book’s religious bias or its violations of the state Education Code. We found this surprising and very disappointing. A Venetia Valley teacher also offered comments.

The Bronze Bow was a “discussion item” at the next CAC meeting, on October 26th, and after another opportunity for public comments (there were none), the council engaged in discussion aloud among themselves. They focused only on how teachers should teach around the book, not on whether the book’s flaws make it impossible to use it at all in a legal and even-handed manner. Surprisingly, one CAC member, a Davidson assistant principal, said that this has been an eye-opening experience at the school, generating extensive staff discussion, and that the book will never be taught the same way again. This characterization was completely contrary to everything that had been said to us by the school until then, and the principal has still never communicated any changes in position to us. But, despite this frank acknowledgment of the issues we had raised, the actual CAC discussion included nothing whatsoever about whether:

- the book promotes Christian doctrine, in violation of Article 9, Section 8 of the state Constitution

- it is alarming that the author's stated goals for the book were to help "young people to meet Jesus" and to portray Jesus as "a hero to whom a boy in any age would gladly offer all his loyalty"
- the book contains biased, historically inaccurate representations that reflect adversely on Jews and Judaism, in violation of Sections 51500 and 51501 of the state Education Code
- the book violates several requirements concerning religious neutrality in the state's "Criteria For Evaluating Instructional Materials", used for state textbook adoption
- the book uses concepts which the state has specifically required textbook publishers to remove, namely, that (1) the Jews were responsible for the crucifixion and (2) that Christianity, a religion of "love", is superior to Judaism, a religion of "law"
- offering "choice", with students opting out individually from reading the book, would end up segregating the class by religion
- it would make far more sense instead to ask the school to pick another book, one which works for all students, rather than forcing families to choose another book
- it is even possible at all to develop curriculum to compensate for the book's serious flaws, including who would participate and how it would be done
- the book is truly the best one available for the unit on ancient Rome
- there should be an established process to handle questions / complaints about district curriculum, including summary reports to the CAC and board

Despite our having supplied copies of our remarks, state regulations, and extensive supplementary materials, the discussion took place as if the council members had seen none of them. The members were unaware of what criteria they were required to use in making their recommendations, instead acting as if they had complete discretion to choose their own. During the meeting, the district superintendent stated that it might be good to give all the schools copies of state guidelines for teaching about religion in public schools. How could this not have already been done?

In the end, the CAC formulated and passed the following resolution:

"Considering that *The Bronze Bow* is a supplemental historical novel and students may choose to opt out of reading it, [we] move that *The Bronze Bow* remain in the curriculum."

In other words, the CAC recommended no changes at all. No change of book and not even any change in how the book is taught, despite having just had an extensive discussion of precisely that.

The Curriculum Advisory Council is an advisory body, and it sent this recommendation on to the school board, which makes all final decisions. *The Bronze Bow* is expected to be an information item at the December school board meeting, which takes place at Coleman School, on December 11th, at 6:00 p.m.