

# Sen. Kapenga: Open letter to Dr. Jill Underly

Posted on Monday, May 2, 2022

>> **WisPolitics is now on the State Affairs network. Get custom keyword notifications, bill tracking and all WisPolitics content. [Get the app or access via desktop.](#)**

May 2, 2022

Dr. Jill Underly

State Superintendent of Public Instruction

125 S. Webster Street

Madison, WI 53703

Dear Dr. Underly:

I am writing out of concern regarding an Educational Equity Leadership Series offered to teachers through The Network, a website that collaborates with Wisconsin Department of Instruction (DPI) and federally-funded through grants from the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

A February 2022 webinar featured Charlene Carruthers, and was described as being based on her recent book, *Unapologetic: A Black, Queer, and Feminist Mandate for Radical Movements*. The session promised to provide a playbook “for people who are interested in, or already committed to social justice and transformation.”

Ms. Carruthers defines herself on her website first and foremost as a political strategist, which makes it concerning and questionable about how the political writings of someone who would be considered a radical activist by a large portion of my constituents is relevant for training our teachers, or in executing the IDEA mission to help children with disabilities to excel in school and thrive in society.

Of equal concern was her comment about Critical Race Theory (CRT). Ms. Carruthers is quoted as saying “I can tell you for sure [CRT] is not the most radical thing to come out. Wait until you hear what we really think, what we really believe in.”

I’d rather not wait, I’d like to know now:

- What are these views that parents and the public would be surprised to learn DPI holds to and believes in? It’s clear that Ms. Carruthers recognizes a solidarity between herself and DPI, DPI staff, other speakers in the leadership series, and her audience. So, please tell me.
- Does DPI believe it is the duty of teachers to teach the caveats of activism, white privilege, systemic racism, and sexual identity in the classroom?
- Will DPI be asking speakers with alternative views to be a part of the series to offer an exchange of views? There is a lengthy list of presenters on the website with similar thematic titles.
- Will DPI make these webinars accessible on The Network website so that parents and the public can view the content?
- How does this subject matter meet the stated purpose of IDEA: to make available “a free appropriate public education to eligible children with disabilities throughout the nation and ensure special education and related services to those children?”
- Furthermore, how does this subject matter fulfill the mission of DPI “to ensure that every child, regardless of zip code, has access to quality public education programs, enrichment opportunities, and special education supports, so that all of our kids can be successful?”

At a time when our schools are failing our children, as reflected in the already low and declining proficiency rates we see across our state—even after having received unprecedented amounts of money—I would think DPI and staff would be more focused on their mission to help raise student scores rather than creating activist, CRT, “leadership” training for publically-paid teachers.

I look forward to your responses to my questions. Parents throughout the state deserve to know what DPI is doing to raise test scores and ensure every Wisconsin child graduates ready for further education and the workplace. That is what they



elected you to do.

Sincerely,

Chris Kapenga

Senate President

33rd Senate District