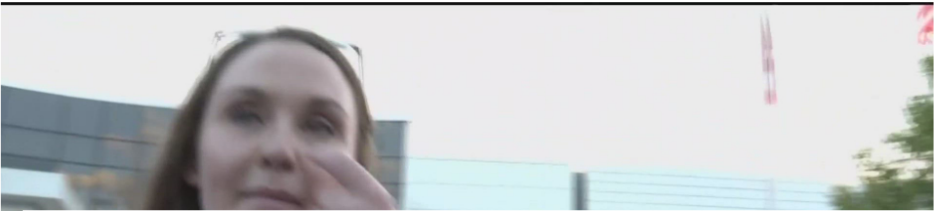




LOCAL NEWS

Cobb County School Board votes to fire fifth-grade teacher over book

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Author: Gabriella Nunez, Jon Shirek
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COBB COUNTY, Ga. — A Cobb County teacher was terminated Thursday night after a months-long saga about whether she was purposely defying district policies and breaking Georgia's Divisive Concepts Law by reading a book to her class.

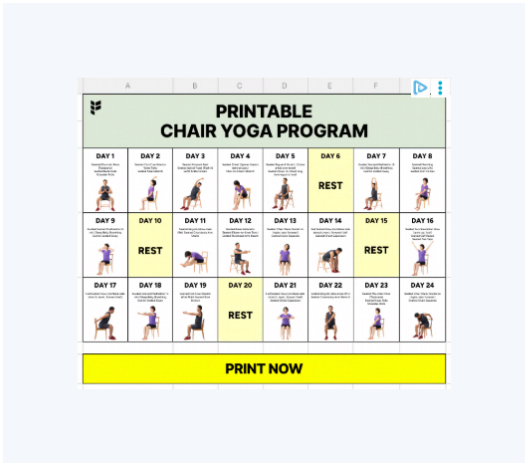
Due West Elementary fifth-grade teacher Katherine Rinderle's controversy is over "My Shadow Is Purple," which discusses gender identity. Her lesson was challenged by concerned parents, which triggered the state law that places restrictions on how grade school teachers can discuss race and other topics in the classroom.

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Cobb County School Board members voted four to three to accept the superintendent's recommendation to terminate Rinderle. Becky Sayler, Leroy Tre' Hutchins, and Nichelle Davis were the three who voted against firing her.

Just prior to the vote, Sayler made a motion to table it, to allow board members more time to discuss the superintendent's recommendation and the findings of the district's Tribunal, which determined last week that [Rinderle used poor judgment, but recommended against firing her](#). The motion to "table" was defeated, four to three: Sayler, Hutchins and Davis voted to table it, but David Chastain, David Banks, Brad Wheeler and Randy Scamihorn voted against tabling it. Then the same four board members voted to fire Rinderle--Chastain, Banks, Wheeler and Scamihorn.

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Craig Goodmark, the teacher's attorney, said that to his understanding Rinderle's dismissal is effective immediately. Rinderle had been on paid leave until the school board made its decision.

"She's disappointed that it went this way, especially after two days of hearings, and she still doesn't know what's controversial, what's divisive or what's sensitive," Goodmark said.

Goodmark said teachers statewide are receiving little guidance about what is legal, under the state's new law against "divisive concepts" which requires parental consent before anything divisive is taught in the classroom.

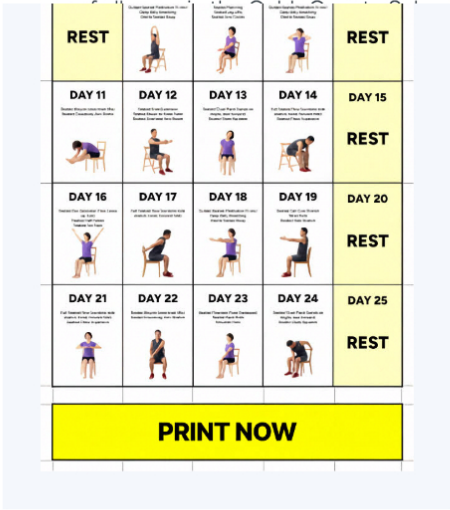
"It's impossible for a teacher to know what's in the minds of parents when she starts her lesson," Goodmark said. "And for parents to be able, with a political agenda from outside the classroom, to come in and have a teacher fired, is simply unfair, it's not right, and it's terrible for Georgia's education system."

Goodmark said he and the Cobb County Association of Educators will explore options to appeal. He added that this does not impact Rinderle's teaching certificate, so she could go to work for another school district.

“The legislature has teachers in fear for their jobs, they don’t know what they can say and what they can’t say, and so I expect that we’ll see more of this, unfortunately,” Goodmark explained.

Some parents asked board members not to fire Rinderle.

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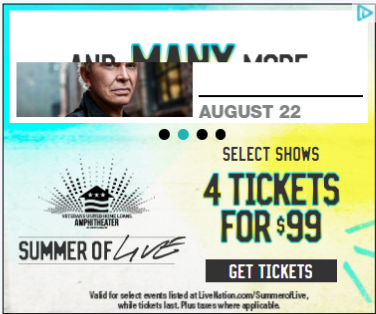


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Beverly Wynn cited statistics that she said underscores how many LGBTQ, nonbinary and gender fluid students there are, of all ages, in the Cobb County School District.

"They exist," Wynn said, "in every classroom, in every grade. They are not people to be shoved in the shadows. They are children, children who, alongside any child who feels that they don’t belong, deserve to be protected from bullying, and know that they are cared for and valued by their teachers. I would ask you to allow teachers to do what they do best—provide an environment of caring and support that enriches the learning process and brings out the best in every child in the classroom."



But most of the parents who spoke to the board Thursday, such as Abigail Darnell, said they wanted Rinderle fired.

"I'm very concerned about the prospect of radical ideas being introduced to young children without parental consent or notification," Darnell said. "Teachers shouldn't be allowed to bring

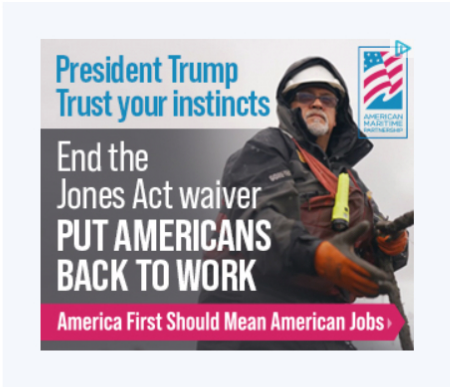
leftist political activism into the classroom and get away with it."

"The district failed to prove that she had done anything wrong," Goodmark said, "failed to define what 'controversial, sensitive and divisive' mean. The board came in, in an act that can only be described as politics over policy, and fired Katie Rinderle."

As for Rinderle, she declined to comment to reporters as she left the school board meeting, embracing supporters.

Rinderle was quoted later in a news release which was emailed to 11Alive from the Southern Poverty Law Center; the SPLC helped defend her.

"I am disappointed in the district's decision to terminate me for reading an inclusive and affirming book - one that is representative of diverse student identities," Rinderle said in the statement, as quoted by the SPCL. "The district is sending a harmful message that not all students are worthy of affirmation in being their unapologetic and authentic selves. This decision, based on intentionally vague policies, will result in more teachers self-censoring in fear of not knowing where the invisible line will be drawn. Censorship perpetuates harm and students deserve better."

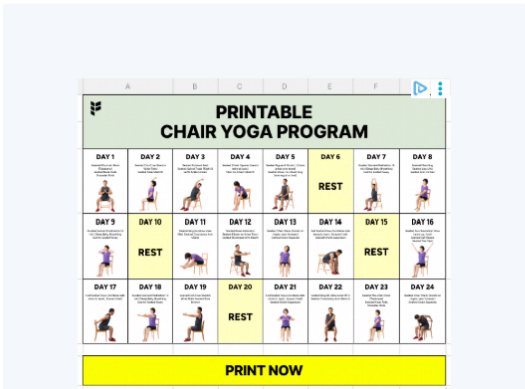


What lead to this fifth-grade Cobb County teacher's firing

In early June, the superintendent sent Rinderle a charge letter that recommended her employment contract be terminated on the grounds of:

- Insubordination
- Willful Neglect of Duties
- Other Good and Sufficient Cause

It was amended twice with the final charge letter dated July 18. After several hearings, a group tasked with hearing the case on behalf of the district found that Rinderle's actions were [not grounds for termination](#).





RELATED: [Tribunal rejects termination for fifth grade Cobb teacher over bringing 'My Shadow Is Purple' to class](#)

However, the Tribunal agreed that Rinderle's actions violated the following school district policies and administrative rules:

- Instructional Resources Selection and Acquisitions
 - Controversial Issues
- 