Statement on the Removal of “We The People” Posters

Feb. 28, 2017

Carroll County Public Schools’ (CCPS) recent removal of posters representing the diversity of women living in the United States because of some complaints that they were “anti-Trump” will only serve to stifle discussion of the increasingly important issue of citizenship and American identity.

The posters, created by artist Shephard Fairey, depict American women—including a Muslim-American and an African-American—in the colors of the American flag and contain captions such as “We The People Defend Dignity” and “We The People Stand With Each Other.” They were created for “a nonpartisan campaign dedicated to igniting a national dialogue about American identity and values through public art and story sharing.”

The mere act of displaying the “We The People” posters does not constitute partisan political activity. The posters do not advocate for or against President Trump, the Republican Party, or their policies, nor do they call on viewers to take political action in support of or opposition to a specific cause.

What the posters do, through their depiction of a variety of women, is further the goals of CCPS Policy IGAA by emphasizing promoting values such as heritage and diversity. They encourage their viewers to think critically about social issues such as ethnicity, religion, and the complex relationships between self-identity as a minority and self-identity as an American.

In order to encourage civic education, it is crucial that our schools promote such critical thinking about social questions. The “We the People” posters can serve as a catalyst for difficult yet profound discussions and help students further explore the meaning of American identity.

By removing the “We the People” posters, CCPS has demonstrated to teachers that discussion of multifaceted, complex issues such as citizenship is subject to censorship. Out of fear of discipline, teachers may choose to avoid such conversations, dealing a blow to civic education and intellectual development. The losers, as always, will be the students.