



CALIFORNIA

Glendale third-grade teacher showed gay pride videos. A year later, furious debate erupts



Glendale third-grade teacher Tammy Tiber, who nearly a year ago showed videos celebrating gay pride to her students, has been involuntarily transferred from her classroom for safety reasons after receiving threats. (Wally Skalij / Los Angeles Times)

BY HOWARD BLUME, MELISSA GOMEZ

MAY 11, 2022 5 AM PT



A Glendale third-grade teacher who nearly a year ago showed videos celebrating gay pride to her students has been involuntarily transferred from her classroom for safety reasons after receiving threats — a local chapter in the nation’s furious debate over what should be taught in schools about gender identity.

The conflict in the Glendale Unified School District, a suburban L.A. County school system of about 25,000 students, centers on four short videos the teacher prepared to show her class. Three of the [videos explain gay pride](#) with songs and animation. One features a [song called, “Love Is Love,”](#) with the message that parents and families come in many configurations and what matters most is the love between a guardian and a child. In another, [“Queer Kids Stuff,”](#) a cheerful young narrator celebrates pride.

The video that has spurred the most objection — and one that some parents said crossed the line of age appropriateness — is [“Talking to Kids about Pride Month.”](#) It shows an enthusiastic roundtable discussion with young children led by Canadian TV personality Jessi Cruickshank.

In the nearly three-minute video, Cruickshank uses the terms “sexual diversity” and “coming out of the closet” and notes that, as a youth, her admiration for actress Jodie Foster made her question her own sexuality, especially after seeing Foster naked in a film, which she said she watched several times. The children joyfully explain the possible advantages of having two parents of the same gender or becoming a “gay icon.”

While it’s not clear which videos were shown in class, parents, teachers, students, activists and community members have packed recent school board meetings — at times shouting or jeering — to express profoundly held views on whether, when and how gender identity lessons are appropriate. At one point a school board member, who supports such lessons, walked out during the public comments.

Some speakers expressed measured concern specifically over the Cruickshank video. Others said parents have a right to remove their child from these lessons or that such

discussions should take place only within the family, not at school.

But California law does not require advance notice or allow an opt-out provision for gender identity lessons.



CALIFORNIA

What California law requires in teaching about LGBTQ people in public schools

May 11, 2022

In support of such instruction, the state’s [history-social science curriculum framework](#) says that gender nonconforming students have unfairly suffered emotionally and academically for being different and that all students have the “fundamental right to be respected and feel safe” regardless of “sexual orientation or gender expression.”

The Glendale conflict is unfolding as teaching about gender identity in public schools has joined other politically fraught, divisive debates, including on [critical race theory](#), [social emotional learning](#) and vaccine mandates for COVID-19.

It also echoes the national controversy over a [new Florida law](#) , which critics call the “Don’t Say Gay” bill, saying it [marginalizes gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people](#). The Florida law forbids classroom instruction on sexual orientation and gender identity in kindergarten through third grade. At least five other states have similar legislation [approved or in the works](#). And at least [19 states have restricted](#) or [are poised](#) to restrict children’s access to support of an individual’s gender identity when it conflicts with that person’s biological gender at birth.

In Glendale, one parent accused the teacher of holding “a sexual orientation class” with 8-year-olds. Another speaker questioned why a teacher was using learning time to push “political and social agendas.”



CALIFORNIA

New attacks from right alarm LGBTQ communities: ‘We’re taking steps backward’

April 26, 2022

Others voiced fervent approval, with one mother praising teachers who “strive to create inclusive, supportive and safe environments for all of their students by teaching about gender diversity in the classroom.”

Several teenagers who are gay or transgender pleaded for acceptance and for such lessons to continue.

“Please stop playing politics with my life,” one student said repeatedly during the one-minute allotted speaking time.

Moments later, up stepped the third-grade teacher, Tammy Tiber, wearing a T-shirt with the message “Love Out Loud.”



Glendale third-grade teacher Tammy Tiber speaks at a May 3 school board meeting about threats she has received. (Glendale Unified School District)

“I had hoped to make my classroom a safe space, and that I could teach my students to love and accept others no matter their differences, even if some of them had been taught to disapprove or hate others who are different from them,” she said. Instead, “my life has turned upside down” said Tiber, who has 34 years of teaching experience and was working at Jefferson Elementary until her transfer. The criticism, she said, has been like a “witch hunt against me.”

The Glendale district has launched a fact-finding effort to figure out what happened. At last week’s meeting, the school board listened quietly — and enforced time limits — as both sides made their points. School board President Nayiri Nahabedian reminded people of the lengthy public process to approve education materials and the complaint process available to parents who object to a lesson.

Tiber’s transfer was not disciplinary, officials told The Times.

The episode has raised alarms for teacher unions. A spokesman for the California Teachers Assn. said he was not aware of another instance in which a district has removed a teacher over curriculum issues based on concerns for safety. The head of another union described what's at stake in stark terms.

Verbal attacks and physical threats against teachers “are creating danger and harm to educators as well as the students,” said Jeff Freitas, president of CFT, a statewide union whose members include many K-12 and college instructors.

Karen Perdue, an area resident who spoke at last week's board meeting, rejected such characterizations.

“I'm not coming here by hate,” she told the board. “I'm coming here by love and asking the board to listen to the parents not to indoctrinate our children on items that we don't want discussed.”

The lesson took place near the end of the 2021 school year when Tiber was teaching remotely from her home to students online, an option allowed during that stage of the COVID-19 pandemic. No one complained about the lesson at the time.

The furor erupted last month after Jordan Henry, a Glendale resident and City Council candidate, received 1,300 pages of documents he had requested last fall under public records laws. Glendale Unified officials said he asked for emails on social justice learning standards and lessons, restorative justice and antibias education.

Across the country, topics such as those he inquired about [have become targets](#) of right-wing activists who view the way they are incorporated into public education as harmfully left-leaning, disrespectful of family and patriotic values, and trampling on parental rights.

It was largely one exchange between Tiber and a district curriculum advisor posted on social media that ignited the discord. School district officials verified the authenticity of the emails' content.

“Today I talked to my class about LGBTQ pride month and played 2 short videos from youtube that were geared toward kids,” Tiber wrote on June 7, 2021. “A parent who heard the lesson and discussion made her daughter leave zoom and texted me asking me when I was done discussing sexual orientation so that she could let her kids back into zoom. I was planning on doing more lessons tomorrow and Wednesday, but now I’m afraid to. Here are the videos and lessons I was going to do with my class.”

Tiber then listed links to four videos. Within 30 minutes, Tiber got a response from Craig Lewis, a specialist in “restorative practices & positive behavior intervention and support.” He wrote, in part: “Do not be concerned or afraid.”

Lewis offered full support for three videos. Regarding the Cruickshank video, he said although positive in tone, it used the word “sexual,” which could be a “red flag” for some. He said Tiber should “reconsider” using it — without telling her not to.

Because Tiber was teaching students on Zoom, parent Alvina Piloyan was able to watch lessons. Piloyan said she recalled the Cruickshank video being shown and added that she did not let her daughter finish watching it.

“We’re upset about the curriculum that was taught to 8-year-olds,” Piloyan said in an interview. “We’re just saying it’s inappropriate for that age and that video was not very educational.”

At the time, Piloyan said, she did not contact the teacher or principal about her concerns.

Classroom lessons on gay pride were not the focus of Henry's critique in comments he made at board meetings before the release of the emails. He denounced "Learning for Justice" lessons developed by the Southern Poverty Law Center, a long-standing civil-rights organization based in Alabama. Henry linked these materials to [critical race theory](#) and other practices he finds objectionable.

Henry would not agree to be interviewed unless he could livestream it on his YouTube channel. The Times offered instead to let him make his own audio recording of the interview, but he declined.

The widely used [SPLC materials](#) are [cited as a valuable learning resource](#) by the California Department of Education. Tiber was one of 21 Glendale Unified teachers who were piloting "Learning for Justice," whose goals include dismantling white supremacy and advancing "the human rights of all people."

Through attorney Daniel Rojas, Tiber declined to comment "on which videos she does or does not remember showing to students." But Rojas added that "any videos that Tammy showed to students would have been district approved and age appropriate."

Rojas provided a voicemail recording of one threat Tiber had received.

"You guys are like the devil," said the caller in a profanity-laced message on the Tibers' answering machine. "You're going to get what's coming to you. ... Somebody will be outside your house, I'm sure, a mob."

According to a police report obtained by The Times, the call was later traced to a Victorville woman, who could face criminal charges.

Tiber expressed concern about her safety to the district, especially because her school has no faculty parking and teachers sometimes must walk a block or two through the neighborhood to get to campus.

In response, said her attorney, “the district invited Tammy to take a leave of absence and involuntarily transferred her after she declined that invitation,” which “felt like a punishment.”

In her brief comments at the board meeting, Tiber said: “My current third-graders and parents were left in the dark. When I was suddenly ousted from my classroom, they were robbed of their teacher for the last 33 days of school. One message I received from a student said, ‘Mrs. Tiber, where are you? Nothing is working. Please come back. Everyone misses you.’”

Sitting in the shade after picking up her second-grader, Jefferson Elementary parent Sevana Dadanian said last week she agreed with parents who are upset.

“If that was in my daughter’s class, I wouldn’t like it,” she said.

But Armine Sarikissian, parent of a fifth-grader, said she thinks that Tiber was simply trying to create an inclusive environment: “She was just being a decent human. She didn’t have any bad intentions.”

Times librarian Jen Arcand contributed to this report.



The stories shaping California

Get up to speed with our Essential California newsletter, sent six days a week.

SIGN ME UP

You may occasionally receive promotional content from the Los Angeles Times.



Howard Blume

Twitter Instagram Email Facebook

Howard Blume covers education for the Los Angeles Times. He's won the top investigative reporting prize from the L.A. Press Club and print Journalist of the Year from the L.A. Society of Professional Journalists chapter. He recently retired "Deadline L.A.," a past honoree for best public-affairs radio program, which he produced and co-hosted on KPFK-FM (90.7) for 15 years. He teaches tap dancing and has two superior daughters.



Melissa Gomez

Twitter Instagram Email Facebook

Melissa Gomez is a Metro reporter for the Los Angeles Times. She previously covered education and the 2020 presidential campaign at The Times. A native Floridian, she graduated from the University of Florida.

SUBSCRIBERS ARE READING

SCIENCE & MEDICINE

FOR SUBSCRIBERS

We found 95 instances of plagiarism in a USC scientist's new book. Sales have been suspended



CALIFORNIA

A chunk of Rancho Palos Verdes is sliding into the sea. Can the city stop it?



ENTERTAINMENT & ARTS

Drew Barrymore is too much — and that's just right



CALIFORNIA

Facing corruption trial, Mark Ridley-Thomas gets money, support from big-name L.A. donors



SUBSCRIBERS ARE READING >

FOOD

FOR SUBSCRIBERS

19 cafes that make L.A. a world-class coffee destination

TELEVISION

Chris Rock slaps back at Will and Jada Pinkett Smith — hard — in live Netflix special

TRAVEL & EXPERIENCES

FOR SUBSCRIBERS

Look up: The 32 most spectacular ceilings in Los Angeles

CLIMATE & ENVIRONMENT

'A foundation of racism': California's antiquated water rights system faces new scrutiny

UCLA SPORTS

UCLA beats Arizona in Senior Night send-off, but Jaylen Clark leaves with injury

LAKERS

With their playoff lives at stake, Darvin Ham challenges Lakers' effort and urgency

LATEST CALIFORNIA >

CALIFORNIA

Gov. Gavin Newsom won't deliver a State of the State speech to Californians this year

1 hour ago

CALIFORNIA

Magnitude 3.9 quake hits near Hollister, Calif.

2 hours ago

CALIFORNIA

Amid youth mental health crisis, teens ask for a kinder college admissions process

March 7, 2023

CALIFORNIA

They snorkeled on a Hawaiian honeymoon, then — abandoned — swam for their lives, suit says

March 7, 2023

CALIFORNIA

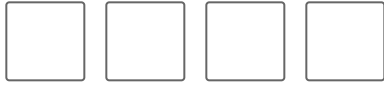
Odds of El Niño returning to California are increasing. Would it bring even more rain?

1 hour ago

[Subscribe for unlimited access](#)

[Site Map](#)

Follow Us



[eNewspaper](#)

[Coupons](#)

[Find/Post Jobs](#)

[Place an Ad](#)

[Media Kit: Why the L. A. Times?](#)

[Bestcovery](#)

MORE FROM THE L.A. TIMES

[Crossword](#)

[Obituaries](#)

[Recipes](#)

[L.A. Times Compare](#)

[L.A. Times Store](#)

[Wine Club](#)

[About/Contact](#)

[For the Record](#)

[L.A. Times Careers](#)

[Manage Subscription](#)

[Reprints and Permissions](#)

[Site Map](#)