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Pennridge School Board terminates Vermilion contract

Board cancels consulting contract with
Vermilion Education seven months after
hiring the controversial firm



The Pennridge school board votes to terminate its consulting contract with Vermilion Education, seven months after hiring the controversial firm to review the district's social studies curriculum. (John Worthington – MediaNews Group)





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EAST ROCKHILL — In a stunning reversal, the Pennridge School Board Monday evening terminated its consulting contract with Vermilion Education LLC, seven months after [hiring the controversial firm](#) to “review and develop” the district’s K-12 social studies curriculum.

The move comes just one week before the board’s reorganization meeting, in which newly-elected board members will be seated. The incoming board will feature a new Democratic majority, who [swept the November election](#) on a [campaign to reverse](#) some of the board’s recent actions, including the hiring of Vermilion.

The contract’s termination caps off months of public outcry and explosive board meetings over the board’s decision to hire the fledgling consulting firm. Opposition centered on Vermilion founder Jordan Adams’ inexperience and ties to the conservative Hillsdale College, with parents accusing the board of attempting to indoctrinate students.

Despite vehement opposition from the public and some board members, the board majority [voted several times](#), as recently as October, to uphold the Vermilion contract.

Contract termination

At Monday’s meeting, the board’s Vermilion opponents appeared surprised at the motion to terminate the contract. While touting their support for the contract’s termination, they criticized the motion for including a \$5,000 invoice for Adams’ final curriculum report.

The 15-page report outlines Vermilion's findings from a review of various social studies and English courses in the school district. The report includes recommendations for "parental notification, balanced points of view or general reconsideration" regarding a number of reading materials as well as accusations of left-wing themes in the curriculum, including criticism of "traditional values," support for "unlimited immigration," and Critical Race Theory.

Board member Joan Cullen blasted the report as an "embarrassment."

"For someone to say that this is a professionally-produced report is laughable. It's basically a recitation of quotes that he pulled out of context," said Cullen. "I certainly do not want to give my stamp of approval to this report, because he will be able to walk away saying he had the support of the Pennridge School Board for this product."

Cullen continued by characterizing the Vermilion contract as a "grift," noting Adams' absence from the district since his June presentation.

"We have not seen hide nor hair of this man since June, yet you have paid him \$35,000 of Pennridge taxpayer money," said Cullen. "This is the biggest grift. Congratulations to him for managing to fool five of you, but I'm not gonna be fooled."

Board member Jordan Blomgren, who negotiated the Vermilion contract, countered by accusing Cullen and other Vermilion opponents of "selective outrage."

"We have spent so much money on previous consultants. There was never the same outrage, never questioning it at all," said Blomgren. "The selective outrage over the Vermilion contract is what is embarrassing."

She concluded by expressing hope that Adams' recommendations will still be considered by the district in order to root out "political bias" in the curriculum.

"It is my hope that the district will take Mr. Adams' reports and give more guidance to teachers to ensure that the delivery and discussion is even-handed," said Blomgren. "As a board member, I will continue to fight to keep bias, social justice activism, CRT and DEI out of our schools."

Following the board's discussion, the motion to terminate the contract was approved 5-0-4, with Blomgren and board members Ricki Chaikin, Megan Banis-Clemens, Bob Cormack and David Reiss voting in the majority and Cullen and board members Christine Batycki, Jonathan Russell and Ron Wurz abstaining.

“I want the record to reflect that Mr. Adams did not get the unanimous approval of the school board,” said Cullen.

“The reason this was on the agenda tonight is because of the community, so thank you,” said Wurz. “I’m thankful to not have to mention the word Vermilion again.”

Vermilion timeline

In April, Pennridge became the first school district in the country to contract with Vermilion Education. The firm was founded in late 2022 by Adams, a Michigan resident and graduate and former employee of Hillsdale College, a private conservative Christian college that has been criticized with claims of whitewashing U.S. history and promoting Christian nationalism. The contract paid Adams \$125 per hour plus travel and accommodation expenses, with no time or expense limits.

While Adams was initially hired to review and develop the K-12 social studies curriculum, his role was expanded to include the middle school Reading, English and Language Arts (RELA) curriculum. In June, Adams presented his curriculum recommendations to the board via Zoom, which included a shifting focus from native American to colonial American history, an increased emphasis on classics and the restriction of books with mature themes.

In August, one week before the beginning of the new school year, the board approved the new social studies curriculum written in collaboration with Adams. The curriculum included a new ninth grade civics, government and economics course in place of the early American history course. The change was condemned by teachers for containing age-inappropriate reading material and eliminating 19th century U.S. history instruction.

The curriculum also revamped the elementary social studies course of study, notably making Hillsdale lesson plans required texts for grades 3-5 social studies. The board eventually agreed to postpone the elementary curriculum until the 2024-2025 school year following concerns from teachers about inadequate preparation time.

The next month, the board approved new RELA curriculum written in collaboration with Adams, which replaced some contemporary books with classics and inspirational stories.

In total, Adams received \$35,000 for his services to the district. Throughout the contract's duration, residents and some board members repeatedly criticized the lack of transparency surrounding Adams' work, particularly his involvement in curriculum writing, saying he does not possess the proper credentials to write curriculum in Pennsylvania.

The next Pennridge school board meeting is on December 4 at 7 p.m. For more information, visit pennridge.org.

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