

The president of the Merton School Board tells me he is "deeply disappointed" that the three language arts teachers at Merton Elementary School forced eighth graders to watch the provocative Christina Aguilera video for the song "Beautiful." Dean Dobberstein says action has been taken to address the situation but won't say what. The teachers have not been fired. According to parents, the video was used by the teachers as an example of having students discuss the use of a theme in creative material. The video is filled with lurid images including a man dressing up as a woman, a same sex kiss and a young woman wearing only scanty underwear.

One parent tells me that students in one of the classes objected but were told by one of the teachers to "grow up, you're in the eighth grade." The parent tells me that is exactly the point---they are only in the eighth grade. The teachers are Katie Francouer, Megan Hess and Brian Fleischman. Superintendent Ronald Ross tells me he has chosen not to fire the three because it is the middle of the school year and he wouldn't be able to find qualified instructors to replace them. Ross says the Merton district is addressing the issue head on and says he knows it will be difficult to regain the community's trust. Ross called the presentation of the video a "lapse in judgment" that is not reflective of the overall ability of the teachers.

Merton is an elementary district that feeds into Arrowhead High School.

Mark Belling
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