

Racial bullying addressed in Hiawatha schools

(KNZA)--The mother of a 14-year-old Hiawatha High School student who was the target of a racially-charged cyber bullying incident last month addressed the Hiawatha school board when they met Monday evening.

Brooke Grier addressed the Board during the public comment portion of the meeting. "It's our understanding that the racism slash disability policy will be added to the handbook tonight, and that's our main reason for attending," Grier told the Board, adding, "I don't necessarily understand why racism and disability are hooked together, but we can save that discussion for later."

Grier said along with that policy, she calls on the district to implement sensitivity training in an effort to alleviate racial bullying. "We also want to make sure that some form of sensitivity training on racism can take place at the school, sometime during this year, for the students and the staff as well. I know in the past it has been promised to other parents, other years, and it has not come to fruition. I do want that taken seriously, and I do expect something to happen, with that, this year."

Board President Ian Schuetz addressed the issue, explaining that due to legal reasons, such topics have to be handled sensitively. "There is sort of an undercurrent narrative going through the community right now that we are tolerant by turning a blind eye to injustices to our kids. We don't have the ability to really hit that directly, to hit that head on, because of the limits that are placed on us from a legal standpoint."

Schuetz said it's his belief that district administrators are working properly in handling such matters. "From where I stand, I do think that our administrators act from a point of fairness, of being honorable, about what they do. I think that there's always a chance for us to go and try and look for ways to improve and do better. I think some of the things that are very pointed right now, I think we're actively working on that."

At the request of Grier, the Board Monday evening approved adding a condensed version of the district's racial harassment policy, which was created in January of this year, to student handbooks for next school year.

Superintendent Lonnie Moser told the Board he's working on creating a diversity council, and has, so far, received four commitments from individuals to serve on the council, which would consist of patrons and facility members.

Board member John Wright suggested that the council also include student

members.

Moser said the group would focus on leading and facilitating efforts to provide students and staff with equitable experiences in USD 415.

It was the consensus of the board that Moser should move forward with the creation of the diversity council and provide an update at next month's meeting.

Following an investigation by the Hiawatha Police Department, two 9th grade boys were charged last month with a misdemeanor count of harassment by telecommunication device in connection with the racial bullying incident.

Moser previously said he could not comment on what disciplinary action was taken by the school district because of student privacy laws.

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