

Date : 3/28/2023 10:26:56 PM

From : "Ornit N"

**Cc : "pooh1j@yahoo.com" , "NinaLaBarre@gmail.com" , nammachez@
"ella.kleynerman@gmail.com" , "Toby Anderson" ,
"onlyjackel@gmail.com" , pontil@pedersen.kristen@wwrsd.org,
cusato.douglas@wwrsd.org, fenarjian.irene@wwrsd.org,
garcia.jason@wwrsd.org, peck.andrea@wwrsd.org, price.stacey@wwrsd.org,
parrino.james@wwrsd.org**

Subject : Antisemitic Vandalism

Dear Dr. Mortimer,

We are a group of parents of Westwood/Washington School District who share concerns regarding this last antisemitic vandalism that took place by a middle schooler in Brookside Elementary school. We have been part of the Westwood/Washington community for many years and have always felt included. However, in light of the [rise in antisemitism in New Jersey and the USA](#), our primary concern is that our children and children from other marginalized groups will feel physically safe and proud in sharing their identity and culture.

We appreciate the school's quick response in cleaning the swastika and the transparency with the parents. However, we want to highlight that this incident wasn't a general bias or hate behavior but a blunt antisemitic incident. To fully address and educate our children on the dangers of antisemitism, we need to call it as it is. Therefore, as much as we support the school's initiative in implementing additional educational programs on biased behavior and hate, this is not a solution to addressing the problem at hand, which is specifically antisemitism. The students and staff must understand what antisemitism is and how it can manifest in these modern times.

We will be happy to collaborate and brainstorm on educational possibilities that can be implemented in the school. Please let us know when we will be meeting to address further collaboration."

We appreciate your prompt response and look forward to continuing this meaningful discussion.

Very truly yours,

Ornit Niv

Orly Jackel

Erika Goldman

Annie Joachim

Ella Kleynerman

Naama Chezar

Nina LaBarre

Jaime Tan

Toby Anderson

Date : 3/14/2023 8:19:29 AM

From : "Jill Mortimer"

To : "Michael Pontillo" , "Kristen Pedersen" , "Stacey Price" , "Andrea Peck" , "Laura Cooper" , "Douglas Cusato" , "Jason Garcia" , "Irene Fenarjian" , "James Parrino"

Cc : "Rena Barone"

Subject : BoE FYI - 3/14/23

Good Morning, BoE Members.

Here is an update on the unfortunate situation at Brookside yesterday:

- ☐ The police investigation has concluded. I cannot speak to what they determined or whether the Bergen County Prosecutor's Office is involved. That is not my role.
- ☐ The actor was a single juvenile. I cannot share any information about the individual, including whether the juvenile is a student in our District. However, I can alleviate concern by saying it was not a student at Brookside School.
- ☐ If it were a student in our District, I would not be able to discipline the child because this happened on Saturday afternoon. I can only punish off campus/hours conduct if it causes a *substantial disruption in the school*. That did not occur because as far as I know, only two adults saw the swastika. The requirement, legally, is that there has to be a nexus to the school, according to Vic (District Attorney).
- ☐ Had the swastika was discovered in the school, I would refer to [Regulation 5600](#). The infraction would be "Bias Language," which comes with a first offense penalty of a one-day out-of-school suspension, referral to school counseling, and a possible HIB finding. I will put this topic on the agenda for the next Policy Committee meeting because we should change the language to say Bias Language or Symbol. The committee members can also review the discipline imposed to determine whether they feel what is written is appropriate.
- ☐ Dr. Carmichael and Ms. Calderon will be in charge of determining the educational programming that will come as a result of this. Last I heard, Dr. Carmichael has not received a return call from the North Jersey Jewish Federation. I will meet with Courtney and Bronwen this morning, and we will be actively developing a plan today. I saw on Facebook some Brookside parents want to do an assembly for the students on this topic. Please know that will be politely declined, as we need professionals who are trained in addressing this topic appropriately.
- ☐ I will put another parent/staff letter out once I have an action plan. Hopefully this will be today or tomorrow morning at the latest. I'm on it.

Take care.

--

***Jill Mortimer, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools
Westwood Regional School District
701 Ridgewood Road
Township of Washington, New Jersey 07676
201-664-0880 x2001***

Date : 3/13/2023 10:47:22 AM

From : "Jill Mortimer"

To : "Michael Pontillo" , "Kristen Pedersen" , "Stacey Price" , "Andrea Peck" , "Laura Cooper" , "Douglas Cusato" , "Jason Garcia" , "Irene Fenarjian" , "James Parrino"

Cc : "Rena Barone"

Subject : Fwd: IMG_8036-preview.pvt

Attachment : IMG_8036.heic;

Good Morning,

This morning, a parent reported seeing a swastika on Brookside School property. The Administrator photographed it and then scratched it out so that students would not see it. We reported it to the Westwood Police Department, and we are checking our cameras. It may or may not have been one of our students, so we should not jump to conclusions.

I am preparing a parent/staff letter, and we will contact the Jewish Foundation of Northern NJ.

The picture is attached. You will hear more from me later once we have a better handle on the situation. Everything is very fluid right now.

Sent from my iPhone

--

***Jill Mortimer, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools
Westwood Regional School District
701 Ridgewood Road
Township of Washington, New Jersey 07676
201-664-0880 x2001***

Date : 4/17/2023 6:14:45 PM

From : "Sarah"

To : ken.rota@wwrsd.org, "kenneth.rota@wwrsd.org" , "Jill Mortimer" , "Jason Garcia" , "Stacey Price" , "Laura Cooper" , "Irene Fenarjian" , pedersen.kristen@wwrsd.org, "Andrea Peck" , parrino.james@wwrsd.org, cusato.douglas@wwrsd.org, pontillo.michael@wwrsd.org

Subject : Parent Notification

Mr. Rota and WWRSd BOE,

Welcome to the district, Mr. Rota. I wanted to share some feedback regarding an incident that recently occurred in my son's 5th grade class at Berkeley Elementary School.

A couple of weeks before spring break, my son asked to speak with me privately after school. He told me about something that happened in his classroom that was scary and upsetting to him, and then made me promise not to tell anyone, including my husband/his father. The story is not worth repeating because I don't know what the truth is, and I'm sure you're all aware of the actual events that took place.

When he told me what happened (from what he saw and what he was told by a student involved), it sounded so outlandish that I told him it couldn't have happened because the school would have notified the parents. He was upset that I didn't believe him and when he insisted, I told him, again, that if anything happened I would hear about it, officially, from the district. Since I never heard anything and was later approached by another parent, I reached out to his teacher and to Principal Fiorello. They were sympathetic and unable to disclose any details.

I would love more clarification as to when incidents are shared with parents and when they are not. I have emails from the district regarding a fight at the high school from earlier in the year, empty shell casings found at Brookside School, and a swastika made of twigs found on school grounds at Brookside School. The 1/10/23 email regarding the empty shell casings incident said "Parental and staff notification by the school was not performed at that time because there was no perceived or actual threat," but ultimately, as it was an item of public concern it was shared. Does the Berkeley incident fall under "no perceived or actual threat" as well? And if an incident isn't disclosed to parents, does that mean educators are not permitted to offer students support? The school emails/calls when either of my children have visited the nurse. I was notified when one son was giggling too much in class and being distracting, when one forgot his homework, when one had an exceptionally great day. But not one word about this.

With students' mental wellbeing a district focus (we have responsive classrooms and there's an open role for a director of school counseling and wellness services position), I feel like the district's response to this incident has fallen flat. Wherever the truth lies, there was an opportunity to dispel rumors, calm student fears, offer support, and tell parents so they can further support their kids if needed. Did you know a group of the kids decided to make a pact not to tell any adult? Because no trusted school educator took the time to take their mental health into account, they spent their recess time trying to make sense of what happened and deciding what to do. How sad is it that kids felt they had to keep this a secret. That's dangerous.

The incident may not be a big deal to adults, but to 10/11-year-olds who have the perception that a very violent event almost took place in their school, this is a big deal to them. My son's friend was crying. A backpack was searched. An allegation made. Kids being taken out of the classroom. He said Mr. Fiorello looked very worried and that it worried him. This was a big deal to these kids. This happened right in front of them. And further, not addressing issues like this can lead to bullying as some of the kids decided they should ignore the student for their own safety. If they don't feel protected, they think they need to

protect themselves.

Please know that for many kids in today's day and age, including my own, school violence is a very real source of anxiety. They've heard the stories on the news. They participate in regular active shooting drills. They are very aware. The district had the opportunity to talk to students, acknowledge fears, and alleviate future concerns by sharing safety protocols, talking to them about how the officer on duty will keep them safe, etc. Instead no one talked to them. And no one let the parents know so parents could address it at home.

Whether this matter falls under the parents "need to know or don't need to know" per the district, I'd ask each of you if your child came home and told you this, would you be ok with how it was handled? Would you be ok hearing this from your child and not from the school? I'm very disappointed.

Sincerely,
Sarah Urscheler

Date : 3/13/2023 12:04:19 PM
From : "Laura Cooper"
To : "Jill Mortimer"
Subject : Re: IMG_8036-preview.pvt

Well, that is just disgusting to see. I could not be more horrified by the fact that someone put that in elementary school grounds.

On Mon, Mar 13, 2023 at 10:47 AM Jill Mortimer <jill.mortimer@wwrsd.org> wrote:

Good Morning,

This morning, a parent reported seeing a swastika on Brookside School property. The Administrator photographed it and then scratched it out so that students would not see it. We reported it to the Westwood Police Department, and we are checking our cameras. It may or may not have been one of our students, so we should not jump to conclusions.

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Sent from my iPhone

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*Jill Mortimer, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools
Westwood Regional School District
701 Ridgewood Road
Township of Washington, New Jersey 07676
201-664-0880 x2001*

Date : 9/5/2023 5:52:16 PM
From : "Sarah Urscheler"
To : "Laura Cooper"
Subject : Re: Parent Notification Policy Question

Thanks so much for your response. I have to be honest, it doesn't feel like we need this. I also worry we are putting too much pressure on teachers to manage these things and that this will be the focus rather than academics. There are some really unhinged parents in this community and I can only imagine the teachers who teach their children will be walking on eggshells this school year. Seeing a resident approach the podium and then turn to the audience filled with educators and address them in a derogatory way was shocking. What has happened to this district?

Getting back to the parental notification policies, I would argue that there's a huge missing piece here. Are you aware there are no hard and fast rules regarding when the district notifies parents about something that happened in their child's classroom/school but not directly to their child? I had written to the board towards the end of the school year about an incident in my son's 5th grade classroom. I won't rehash the details because I don't know firsthand what exactly happened and I've heard multiple versions. But whether it was an actual threat or a perceived threat, my son and other children were affected even though they were not directly involved.

This happened right when Dr. Mortimer went out on leave so I reached out to Mr. Rota, my son's principal, and my son's teacher. I wanted to know why I wasn't informed and why my son/his classmates weren't given any support after. It was a scary incident for them and they were not given the emotional support to get through what they experienced. Further, with parents not being notified, we were unable to help them either. While the kids made a pact not to speak about the incident, my son and a friend broke that pact about 10 minutes after school ended, thankfully, so I was able to talk about his school violence anxiety, acknowledge his fears, and help explain how the school keeps him safe.

I had a great conversation with the principal and teacher who were also distraught and explained that they followed the direction given to them by the administration. I reviewed the parent and student handbooks and asked Mr. Rota how they decide which school incidents require parental notification. My examples to him were that I was notified when a swastika of sticks was found outside of Brookside school (I don't have a Brookside student), I was told of a high school fight (I no longer have a high school student), but I wasn't told about this incident in my son's classroom.

Mr. Rota told me there is no official rulebook and that each incident is looked at individually. I understand there is no "right" way for things like this. Had they told all parents, that could have caused other problems. I also know that things like this aren't black and white and it would be difficult to categorize these incidents. Still, I am confused why I am called or emailed when my children have a hard day (or an exceptionally great day) but then not told of something like the classroom incident.

Anyhow, I am rambling. My point is that we are saying we have parental notification but it's not consistent. I do love hearing about my children's days...if they forgot an assignment, were upset

at lunchtime, or helped a friend on the playground. I really do! But I would also like to know when incidents happen in the classroom, even not directly to my children, but may impact their mental wellness and call into question their safety.

Thanks so much,
Sarah

On Tue, Sep 5, 2023 at 8:49 AM Laura Cooper <cooper.laura@wwrsd.org> wrote:
Ms. Urscheler,

WWRSd lacked a policy with the stated purpose of 9244. As I mentioned in the 8/31 public meeting, 9244 brings together the topics covered by several other policies and ensures that the lines of communication between school and parents remain open. If you read 9244, you will see that the examples listed in the Duty to Inform section are non-exhaustive. The Duty to Inform requires parental notification for any and all matters that potentially impact a child's well being, provided the notification is not based on, either wholly or partially, an actual or perceived characteristic that is protected by the NJ Law Against Discrimination.

As a policy making body, we have a responsibility to not only ensure policies are established to govern the current needs of our community but also to proactively introduce policy to ensure continued future success, as well.

With that, I hope you and your family have a wonderful return to the school routine this week.

Very best,
Ms. Cooper

On Sat, Sep 2, 2023 at 8:45 AM Sarah Urscheler <sarahurschelex@xxxxxx.xxx> wrote:
| Good morning, Ms. Cooper,

Can you please clarify for me what the proposed parent notification policy covers that isn't already covered by other existing policies? I'm trying to understand it better (what it is, why the need).

Thank you,
Sarah Urscheler

Date : 4/18/2023 11:16:21 AM
From : "Laura Cooper"
To : "Sarah"
Subject : Re: Parent Notification

Sarah,
Thank you so much for letting us know. I appreciate your escalation
Very best,
Laura

On Mon, Apr 17, 2023 at 6:14 PM Sarah <simplysarah@gmail.com> wrote:
Mr. Rota and WWRSD BOE,

Welcome to the district, Mr. Rota. I wanted to share some feedback regarding an incident that recently occurred in my son's 5th grade class at Berkeley Elementary School.

A couple of weeks before spring break, my son asked to speak with me privately after school. He told me about something that happened in his classroom that was scary and upsetting to him, and then made me promise not to tell anyone, including my husband/his father. The story is not worth repeating because I don't know what the truth is, and I'm sure you're all aware of the actual events that took place.

When he told me what happened (from what he saw and what he was told by a student involved), it sounded so outlandish that I told him it couldn't have happened because the school would have notified the parents. He was upset that I didn't believe him and when he insisted, I told him, again, that if anything happened I would hear about it, officially, from the district. Since I never heard anything and was later approached by another parent, I reached out to his teacher and to Principal Fiorello. They were sympathetic and unable to disclose any details.

I would love more clarification as to when incidents are shared with parents and when they are not. I have emails from the district regarding a fight at the high school from earlier in the year, empty shell casings found at Brookside School, and a swastika made of twigs found on school grounds at Brookside School. The 1/10/23 email regarding the empty shell casings incident said "Parental and staff notification by the school was not performed at that time because there was no perceived or actual threat," but ultimately, as it was an item of public concern it was shared. Does the Berkeley incident fall under "no perceived or actual threat" as well? And if an incident isn't disclosed to parents, does that mean educators are not permitted to offer students support? The school emails/calls when either of my children have visited the nurse. I was notified when one son was giggling too much in class and being distracting, when one forgot his homework, when one had an exceptionally great day. But not one word about this.

With students' mental wellbeing a district focus (we have responsive classrooms and there's an open role for a director of school counseling and wellness services position), I feel like the district's response to this incident has fallen flat. Wherever the truth lies, there was an opportunity to dispel rumors, calm student fears, offer support, and tell parents so they can further support their kids if needed. Did you know a group of the kids decided to make a pact not to tell any adult? Because no trusted school educator took the time to take their mental health into account, they spent their recess time trying to make sense of what happened and deciding what to do. How sad is it that kids felt they had to keep this a secret. That's dangerous.

The incident may not be a big deal to adults, but to 10/11-year-olds who have the perception that a very violent event almost took place in their school, this is a big deal to them. My son's friend was

crying. A backpack was searched. An allegation made. Kids being taken out of the classroom. He said Mr. Fiorello looked very worried and that it worried him. This was a big deal to these kids. This happened right in front of them. And further, not addressing issues like this can lead to bullying as some of the kids decided they should ignore the student for their own safety. If they don't feel protected, they think they need to protect themselves.

Please know that for many kids in today's day and age, including my own, school violence is a very real source of anxiety. They've heard the stories on the news. They participate in regular active shooting drills. They are very aware. The district had the opportunity to talk to students, acknowledge fears, and alleviate future concerns by sharing safety protocols, talking to them about how the officer on duty will keep them safe, etc. Instead no one talked to them. And no one let the parents know so parents could address it at home.

Whether this matter falls under the parents "need to know or don't need to know" per the district, I'd ask each of you if your child came home and told you this, would you be ok with how it was handled? Would you be ok hearing this from your child and not from the school? I'm very disappointed.

Sincerely,
Sarah Urscheler

Date : 4/21/2023 9:58:04 AM

From : "Sarah"

**To : "Jason Garcia" , "Stacey Price" , "Laura Cooper" , "Irene Fenarjian" ,
pedersen.kristen@wwrsd.org, "Andrea Peck" , parrino.james@wwrsd.org,
cusato.douglas@wwrsd.org, pontillo.michael@wwrsd.org**

Subject : Re: Parent Notification

Good morning,

I'm following up on this. Since I never received an answer from any of you (thank you, Mrs. Cooper, for acknowledging my email), I wanted to share Mr. Rota's response in case any other parent has the same question for you in the future.

"The notification of events to the school community is one of these types of decisions that school administrators are responsible to make on a daily basis."

I am disappointed that the school administrators determined this particular incident was not worthy of sharing with parents. I am hoping that once you're finished prioritizing the health curriculum that you can turn your focus to larger, more important issues like this.

Thank you,
Sarah Urscheler

On Mon, Apr 17, 2023 at 6:14 PM Sarah <simplysarah@gmail.com> wrote:
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Sincerely,
Sarah Urscheler

Date : 3/13/2023 3:45:30 PM
From : "Douglas Cusato"
To : "Jill Mortimer"
Subject : Re: Document shared with you: "March 13"

Jill,

Maybe it's just the picture, but it's that backwards? I believe there are some religions that celebrate such swastika's as a positive thing and weren't specifically linked with the nazi hate crimes.

Get [Outlook for iOS](#)

From: Jill Mortimer (via Google Docs) <drive-shares-dm-noreply@google.com>

Sent: Monday, March 13, 2023 2:46:23 PM

To: cusato.douglas@wwrsd.org; cusato.douglas@wwrsd.org

Cc: cooper.laura@wwrsd.org <cooper.laura@wwrsd.org>; fenarjian.iren@wwrsd.org <fenarjian.irene@wwrsd.org>; garcia.jason@wwrsd.org <garcia.jason@wwrsd.org>; parrino.james@wwrsd.org <parrino.j@wwrsd.org>; peck.andrea@wwrsd.org <peck.andrea@wwrsd.org>; pedersen.kristen@wwrsd.org <pedersen.kristen@wwrsd.org>; pontillo.michael@wwrsd.org <pontillo.michael@wwrsd.org>; price.stacey@wwrsd.org <price.stacey@wwrsd.org>

Subject: Document shared with you: "March 13"

Jill Mortimer shared a document



Jill Mortimer (jill.mortimer@wwrsd.org) has invited you to **view** the following document:

FYI. This message is going out shortly.



March 13

[Open](#)

Google LLC, 1600 Amphitheatre Parkway, Mountain View, CA 94043, USA
You have received this email because jill.mortimer@wwrsd.org shared a document with you from Google Docs.

Google Workspace

Date : 3/14/2023 8:29:43 AM
From : "Jason Garcia"
To : "Jill Mortimer"
Subject : Re: BoE FYI - 3/14/23
Thank you, Jill.

Jay Garcia
(646) 206-1049

On Mar 14, 2023, at 8:19 AM, Jill Mortimer <jill.xxxxxxxx@xxxxx.xxx> wrote:

Good Morning, BoE Members.

Here is an update on the unfortunate situation at Brookside yesterday:

- ☐ The police investigation has concluded. I cannot speak to what they determined or whether the Bergen County Prosecutor's Office is involved. That is not my role.
- ☐ The actor was a single juvenile. I cannot share any information about the individual, including whether the juvenile is a student in our District. However, I can alleviate concern by saying it was not a student at Brookside School.
- ☐ If it were a student in our District, I would not be able to discipline the child because this happened on Saturday afternoon. I can only punish off campus/hours conduct if it causes a *substantial disruption in the school*. That did not occur because as far as I know, only two adults saw the swastika. The requirement, legally, is that there has to be a nexus to the school, according to Vic (District Attorney).
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- ☐ I will put another parent/staff letter out once I have an action plan. Hopefully this will be today or tomorrow morning at the latest. I'm on it.

Take care.

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Jill Mortimer, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools
Westwood Regional School District
701 Ridgewood Road

Township of Washington, New Jersey 07676
201-664-0880 x2001

Date : 4/17/2023 7:35:52 PM
From : "Kenneth Rota"
To : "Michael Fiorello"
Subject : Fwd: Parent Notification

Mike,

Please give me a call tomorrow to fill me in on this.

Ken

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Sarah** <simplysarah@gmail.com>

Date: Mon, Apr 17, 2023 at 6:14 PM

Subject: Parent Notification

To: <ken.rota@wwrsd.org>, kenneth.rota@wwrsd.org <kenneth.rota@wwrsd.org>, Jill Mortimer <jill.mortimer@wwrsd.org>, Jason Garcia <garcia.jason@wwrsd.org>, Stacey Price <price.sta@wwrsd.org>, Laura Cooper <cooper.laura@wwrsd.org>, Irene Fenarjian <fenarji@wwrsd.org>, <pedersen.kristen@wwrsd.org>, Andrea Peck <peck.andrea@wwrsd.org>, <parrino.james@wwrsd.org>, <cusato.douglas@wwrsd.org>, <pontillo.michael@wwrsd.org>

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Sincerely,
Sarah Urscheler

Date : 3/13/2023 3:21:46 PM
From : "Jill Mortimer"
To : "District All"
Subject : Important Email from Dr. Mortimer

Dear WWRSD Staff:

This morning, a Brookside School parent reported finding a Swastika, ***which is a symbol of hate***, on the grounds of the school. It was created with twigs, and it was about one foot long by one foot wide. We immediately reported it to the Westwood Police Department. The District Administration and Westwood Police Department worked in concert to quickly identify the individuals involved, as there was video evidence. At the writing of this email, the police investigation remains ongoing. The Principals of our other schools checked their grounds, and we did not locate additional Swastikas. Moreover, we contacted the Jewish Foundation of Northern New Jersey. They are activating their teams to provide resources and assistance to us.

This act is a hate crime; it is not freedom of speech. We have removed the Swastika to prevent exposure to this message of intolerance.

As I have said in the past, the Westwood Regional School District condemns all acts of hate, violence and intolerance. These expressions are detrimental to the well-being of all people, in all environments, and especially for children and educators in our schools. When acts such as these take place in our schools, we need to make sure people realize this does not reflect our views and beliefs, is not accepted, and will be investigated.

Your continued support in spreading a message of kindness and respect for all remains paramount in our partnership. We cannot let messages of hate darken our wonderful community.

In the meantime, please reach out to the Director of Elementary Education, Dr. Courtney Carmichael (courtney.carmichael@wwrsd.org), if you would like to share your opinions or suggestions related to this situation. However, please keep in mind she cannot share additional information with you since there is a police investigation.

We will provide more information when it becomes available.
Thank you.

--

Jill Mortimer, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools
Westwood Regional School District

***701 Ridgewood Road
Township of Washington, New Jersey 07676
201-664-0880 x2001***

Date : 4/17/2023 6:14:45 PM

From : "Sarah"

To : ken.rota@wwrsd.org, "kenneth.rota@wwrsd.org" , "Jill Mortimer" , "Jason Garcia" , "Stacey Price" , "Laura Cooper" , "Irene Fenarjian" , pedersen.kristen@wwrsd.org, "Andrea Peck" , parrino.james@wwrsd.org, cusato.douglas@wwrsd.org, pontillo.michael@wwrsd.org

Subject : Parent Notification

Mr. Rota and WWRSD BOE,

Welcome to the district, Mr. Rota. I wanted to share some feedback regarding an incident that recently occurred in my son's 5th grade class at Berkeley Elementary School.

A couple of weeks before spring break, my son asked to speak with me privately after school. He told me about something that happened in his classroom that was scary and upsetting to him, and then made me promise not to tell anyone, including my husband/his father. The story is not worth repeating because I don't know what the truth is, and I'm sure you're all aware of the actual events that took place.

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Sincerely,
Sarah Urscheler

Date : 4/18/2023 7:53:53 AM
From : "Michael Fiorello"
To : "Kenneth Rota"
Subject : Re: Parent Notification

Hi, I left you a voicemail...I can give you all the background/information; call me when you have a second, if possible.
Thank you.

On Mon, Apr 17, 2023 at 7:36 PM Kenneth Rota <kenneth.rota@wwrsd.org> wrote:
Mike,

Please give me a call tomorrow to fill me in on this.

Ken

----- Forwarded message -----

From: Sarah <simplysarah@gmail.com>

Date: Mon, Apr 17, 2023 at 6:14 PM

Subject: Parent Notification

To: <ken.rota@wwrsd.org>, kenneth.rota@wwrsd.org <kenneth.rota@wwrsd.org>, Jill Mortimer <jill.mortimer@wwrsd.org>, Jason Garcia <garcia.jason@wwrsd.org>, Stacey Price <price.sta@wwrsd.org>, Laura Cooper <cooper.laura@wwrsd.org>, Irene Fenarjian <fenarji@wwrsd.org>, <pedersen.kristen@wwrsd.org>, Andrea Peck <peck.andrea@wwrsd.org>, <parrino.james@wwrsd.org>, <cusato.douglas@wwrsd.org>, <pontillo.michael@wwrsd.org>

Mr. Rota and WWRSD BOE,

Welcome to the district, Mr. Rota. I wanted to share some feedback regarding an incident that recently occurred in my son's 5th grade class at Berkeley Elementary School.

A couple of weeks before spring break, my son asked to speak with me privately after school. He told me about something that happened in his classroom that was scary and upsetting to him, and then made me promise not to tell anyone, including my husband/his father. The story is not worth repeating because I don't know what the truth is, and I'm sure you're all aware of the actual events that took place.

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Brookside School. The 1/10/23 email regarding the empty shell casings incident said "Parental and staff notification by the school was not performed at that time because there was no perceived or actual threat," but ultimately, as it was an item of public concern it was shared. Does the Berkeley incident fall under "no perceived or actual threat" as well? And if an incident isn't disclosed to parents, does that mean educators are not permitted to offer students support? The school emails/calls when either of my children have visited the nurse. I was notified when one son was giggling too much in class and being distracting, when one forgot his homework, when one had an exceptionally great day. But not one word about this.

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Sincerely,
Sarah Urscheler

--

Mr. Michael J. Fiorello, Principal

Berkeley Elementary School

47 Berkeley Avenue

Westwood, NJ 07675

T: (201) 664-7760

F: (201) 664-1168



Date : 4/19/2023 7:35:43 PM
From : "Sarah"
To : kenneth.rota@wwrsd.org
Subject : Re: Parent Notification

Hello- I'm making sure you received my email.

Thank you,
Sarah Urscheler

On Mon, Apr 17, 2023 at 6:14 PM Sarah <simplysarah@gmail.com> wrote:
Mr. Rota and WWRSD BOE,

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Sincerely,
Sarah Urscheler

Date : 4/20/2023 3:31:25 PM
From : "Kenneth Rota"
To : "Sarah"
Subject : Re: Parent Notification

Dear Ms. Urscheler,

I received your earlier email. I apologize for the delayed response. I have been playing some "catch up" since I arrived.

I believe that you are aware that I can not discuss the situation with another student. I am sorry that your son was affected by this. The school and the district do have supports in place for students.

I encourage you to contact your son's teacher or the counselor at Berkeley School if you feel that is necessary.

The notification of events to the school community is one of these types of decisions that school administrators are responsible to make on a daily basis. These types of decision are not easy and I am sure that a great deal of thought was involved in the decision making process. I have discussed the situation with Mr. Fiorello.

The district administrators are aware of the culture and climate of the buildings. This is very important given the times that we are living in now. Unfortunately, school violence is becoming common occurrence. School safety and security is on the agenda when the administrators meet.

I am hopeful that, moving forward, your and your son's experience at Berkeley School will be positive.

Respectfully,

Ken Rota

On Mon, Apr 17, 2023 at 6:14 PM Sarah <simplysarah@gmail.com> wrote:
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Sincerely,
Sarah Urscheler

Date : 3/14/2023 8:18:50 AM

From : "Jill Mortimer"

To : "Michael Pontillo" , "Kristen Pedersen" , "Stacey Price" , "Andrea Peck" , "Laura Cooper" , "Douglas Cusato" , "Jason Garcia" , "Irene Fenarjian" , "James Parrino"

Cc : "Rena Barone"

BCc : "Courtney Carmichael" , "Bronwen Calderon" , "Kelly Hughes" , "Kristin Gomez" , "Nicole Ferlise"

Subject : BoE FYI - 3/14/23

Good Morning, BoE Members.

Here is an update on the unfortunate situation at Brookside yesterday:

- ☐ The police investigation has concluded. I cannot speak to what they determined or whether the Bergen County Prosecutor's Office is involved. That is not my role.
- ☐ The actor was a single juvenile. I cannot share any information about the individual, including whether the juvenile is a student in our District. However, I can alleviate concern by saying it was not a student at Brookside School.
- ☐ If it were a student in our District, I would not be able to discipline the child because this happened on Saturday afternoon. I can only punish off campus/hours conduct if it causes a *substantial disruption in the school*. That did not occur because as far as I know, only two adults saw the swastika. The requirement, legally, is that there has to be a nexus to the school, according to Vic (District Attorney).
- ☐ Had the swastika was discovered in the school, I would refer to [Regulation 5600](#). The infraction would be "Bias Language," which comes with a first offense penalty of a one-day out-of-school suspension, referral to school counseling, and a possible HIB finding. I will put this topic on the agenda for the next Policy Committee meeting because we should change the language to say Bias Language or Symbol. The committee members can also review the discipline imposed to determine whether they feel what is written is appropriate.
- ☐ Dr. Carmichael and Ms. Calderon will be in charge of determining the educational programming that will come as a result of this. Last I heard, Dr. Carmichael has not received a return call from the North Jersey Jewish Federation. I will meet with Courtney and Bronwen this morning, and we will be actively developing a plan today. I saw on Facebook some Brookside parents want to do an assembly for the students on this topic. Please know that will be politely declined, as we need professionals who are trained in addressing this topic appropriately.
- ☐ I will put another parent/staff letter out once I have an action plan. Hopefully this will be today or tomorrow morning at the latest. I'm on it.

Take care.

--

***Jill Mortimer, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools
Westwood Regional School District
701 Ridgewood Road
Township of Washington, New Jersey 07676
201-664-0880 x2001***

Date : 6/14/2023 11:39:09 AM

From : "Sarah"

To : "Jill Mortimer"

Subject : District Feedback

Hi, Dr. Mortimer,

Welcome back. I hope you are feeling well. I know you are likely going through hundreds of emails, if not more, as you return. I had emailed the board of education and Mr. Rota several times while you were out and tried to cc you on my communications for awareness.

I just wanted to share my perspective with you and my hope that, with your return, the district can unite and move forward.

Board of Education Conduct

I have been largely disappointed with the conduct of several board members, both at meetings and on social media. In my opinion, they are driving the biggest divide within the community. To be frank, I voted, over the past few years, for all of the current Westwood board members. I had faith in them. And now I feel really hoodwinked. They are having difficulty working together, they are contradicting themselves, they are not transparent at all, and they don't seem to care what the public majority thinks. Online, Doug Cusato and Kristen Pedersen have said very awful things to community members who share differing views. Doug Cusato has also referenced banning books and doing all he can to prevent a "woke" school agenda, whatever that is. He also spreads misinformation on topics like the health curriculum. Kristen Pederson is a moderator on a closed Facebook group where district rumors swirl, conspiracy theories abound, and incorrect information is shared. Please know that at times your name is brought up on a first name basis. For example, regarding the health curriculum, one community member said something like 'Let Jill know' or 'We'll tell Jill.' This implies a personal relationship, and, I think that could be taken the wrong way. Regarding the board, I don't feel the board majority represents my family or has any desire to do anything other than focus on their own personal agendas. I have been disappointed in Mike Pontillo's leadership, especially in the way he speaks to some board members and community members. They need an intervention, more training, and they need to be held accountable. Aren't there rules against the way they use social media? I also emailed Mr. Rota because, based on the conduct of some of these board members, I do not want my children interacting with them within their classrooms. In September I will send an email to the school principals asking I be informed ahead of time when any board member is invited into their classroom, for example to read during Read Across America Week. With their recent conduct, I do not want them near my children.

Ad-Hoc Committee

A huge waste of time and resources. Pontillo is also not being transparent at all as he has not even publicly stated what the true purpose of the committee is. A very small number of students have opted out of specific lesson plans. This is a state-mandated curriculum and this was already approved by the BOE and put in place. Why are we focusing on this? Again, it's based on the personal agendas of a few board members.

Flag Policy

I understand you will be sharing your position on this with the district. My two cents is the language in this new policy doesn't reference lawn signs, and, this is a dangerous road I'd rather not see our district go down. I don't agree with the stance but if it is the position of the district, the language in the policy needs to change and no signs (teacher appreciation, read across america, happy birthday, congrats grads) should be permitted either. I would rather see the district allow the Pride flag sign as that would send a strong message to our students that the district hears them, acknowledges them, and supports them.

Berkley 5th Grade Classroom Incident

I reached out to you about this just as you went on leave so you may not have seen my email. There was an incident in my son's 5th grade classroom back in April. I have spoken with Mr. Fiorello and my son's teacher to share my thoughts but I wanted you to know I am very disappointed in the way it was handled. I still don't have the factual information of what happened but I want you to know my son and other students were really disturbed by it. Since no one (teacher, principal, guidance counselor, SLEO) spoke to the kids after, it left many kids feeling confused and scared. And since parents weren't informed, we missed the opportunity to alleviate our children's fears. My son sits in a responsive classroom. I am informed when he has a great day or a bad day. He, and classmates, were spoken to no less than 4 times over the span of a few days when they misbehaved for a substitute media teacher. And yet this incident happened and no one spoke with them. No one told parents. Please know that my son is being treated for anxiety and one of the fears he shared with his doctor is his fear of school violence. This incident hit close to home for him and the district dropped the ball on a great opportunity to help these students through a scary situation. I asked Mr. Rota to clarify when parents are told of incidents as I couldn't find anything in the Parent Handbook and because I had received an email for a fight at the high school (I have no high school students) as well as a swastika made of twigs at Brookside school. Mr. Rota told me there is no specific policy and it is up to the discretion of the administration. I implore you to reconsider this and to put in writing the rules around when and why parents are notified of in-school incidents.

Book Banning

Cusato has been very vocal on social media about his views that not all library books should be available to children. He has stated online "First history books, then the library. It's going to be a busy few months." I am not interested in seeing this district go down this path of censoring. If Cusato doesn't want his kids to read something, that's on him. He and other board members seem to not understand that many parents do want him making decisions for all kids. I've been watching what's been happening in Roxbury and I dread that's the road he, Pederson, Pontillo, Price, Fenarjian, and Parrino are dragging us down.

Eight years ago my husband and I bought our house in Westwood. It reminded me of everything I liked about Ramsey where I grew up - the walkable downtown, the tight-knit community, the good schools. But it had one thing Ramsey didn't - diversity. In my oldest son's kindergarten year, Berkeley was named a Blue Ribbon School. I was so happy that we chose to put our roots down here. But in just a few years things have changed, drastically, for the worse. I see a divided community, personal agendas at play, shameful conduct, lack of transparency. The ironic thing is that Ramsey High School, right now, is flying a Pride flag alongside the US flag in front of the school. All of this leaves me wondering if I've made the wrong choice for my family.

I am hopeful that you have the ability to get everything back on track. Should the board of education continue down this path, it would no longer be in the best interest of my children to attend the WWRSD district. I am hoping that it doesn't come down to that but my children are my priority and I do not want them raised in a small-minded, backwards-moving school district and community.

Thank you for your time,
Sarah Urscheler

Date : 3/14/2023 2:08:22 PM
From : "Westwood Regional School District"
To : jill.mortimer@wwrsd.org
Subject : Follow Up Email from Dr. Mortimer



March 14, 2023

Dear Westwood Regional School District Staff and Parents:

I sincerely hope you and your family members are well. I am writing today to provide an update on the swastika that was found on the grounds of Brookside School on Monday morning. We have both short-term and long-term goals for addressing this incident.

Status of the Investigation

- ☐ The incident took place on Saturday afternoon (March 11).
- ☐ The police investigation has concluded. I cannot speak to what they determined or whether the Bergen County Prosecutor's Office is involved. I do not have authorization to speak on their behalf, and it would be inappropriate for me to do so.
- ☐ The actor was a single juvenile. I cannot share any information about the individual, including whether the juvenile is a student in our District. However, I can alleviate concern by saying it was not a student at Brookside School.
- ☐ The students and staff in Brookside School are safe, and there is no threat to them as a result of this hate incident.

How the District is Handling the Bias Incident

- ☐ If it were a student in our District, we would not be able to discipline the individual because this happened on Saturday afternoon. We can only punish off campus/after hours conduct if it causes a *substantial disruption* with the orderly operation of the *school*. According to New Jersey Administrative Code 6A:16-7.5, it would have to *materially and substantially interfere with the requirements of appropriate discipline in the operation of the school*. That did not occur because two adults were the only ones who saw the swastika. I realize some of you may not be pleased with this, and I readily acknowledge the image created a substantial disruption in the *community*.
- ☐ Had the swastika created a substantial disruption *in the school*, I would refer to [Regulation 5600](#). The infraction would be "Bias Language," which comes with a first offense penalty of a one-day out-of-school suspension, referral to school counseling,

and a possible HIB finding. I will put this topic on the agenda for the next Policy Committee meeting because the Board should expand the language to say Bias Language or Symbol. The Administration and committee members will review the discipline called for to determine whether they feel what is written is appropriate.

Action Plan for Addressing Hate in our Schools

- We heard back from the Jewish Federation of Northern New Jersey, and they complimented our handling of the bias incident to date.
- I contacted the Bergen County Prosecutor's Office to request an educational presentation for middle and high school students on Bias Crimes. Both Dr. Ferlise and Mr. Connelly scheduled student presentations with a detective from that office. The High School one is tentatively slated for March 24, and the middle school presentation will be held in March as well.
- Director of Elementary Education Dr. Carmichael contacted the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), and we are speaking to them about their "No Place for Hate" programming for each of our six schools. We want to create awareness about the impact of bias behavior.
- ***Please know the District has conducted 36 programs on preventing harassment, intimidation and bullying this school year alone. It is a regular part of our programming, and we are committed to maintaining a welcoming environment for all of our students. We have no tolerance for hate.***
- We just implemented the Responsive Classroom program in the elementary schools this school year, and we intend to expand it to the middle grades next year. The Morning Meeting Responsive Classroom practices consists of everyone in the classroom gathering in a circle at the beginning of each school day and proceeding through four sequential components: greeting, sharing, group activity, and morning message. At the middle school level, morning meetings are replaced by advisory lessons which share the same core beliefs as morning meetings, but with a developmentally appropriate approach. In fact, advisory lessons are already taking place at the middle school. Core beliefs associated with the program include cooperation, assertiveness, responsibility, empathy and self-control.

October Bias Incident in the High School

There has been speculation on social media that the District did not respond to another anti-semitic act that happened in October. That is not accurate. Here is an excerpt from the staff/parent letter that I issued on October 6, 2022:

"The District determined a ***non-District minor's*** Internet Protocol (IP) address likely infiltrated one of our student's accounts. This information was provided to the Township of Washington Police Department, and they are consulting with the Bergen County Cyber Crimes Unit."

The offender was ***NOT*** one of our students. Therefore, the District did not have authority to punish that individual. However, we readily cooperated with the law enforcement investigation. I

am not able to divulge the result of the police investigation because as I said, I cannot speak on their behalf. Moreover, High School Principal Mr. Connelly addressed what happened with students by saying, in part, “as a member of this community as a resident and the Principal, I am appalled by the absolute disregard for human decency and respect. I truly apologize for the fact that you witnessed this. This type of behavior is unacceptable, and it does not live up to the values of the Westwood Regional School District. I know we are better than this! Instead of letting this situation bring us down, let's take it as an opportunity to be better, kinder, more accepting and compassionate, and more empathetic towards each other. If you are struggling in any way, please do not hesitate to reach out to your counselor or myself. I take great pride in having an open door policy for all of our students. I leave you with this quote from Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. “I have decided to stick with love. Hate is too great a burden to bear.””

In closing, please continue to have faith in the District's leadership. We have followed the appropriate steps in the Department of Education's guide for responding to hate incidents and bias-related acts. Furthermore, I have consulted with the District's attorney on more than one occasion to keep him abreast of the developments. Your trust in us is invaluable, and we appreciate your support during this difficult time.

Sincerely,

Jill Mortimer, Ed.D.

Date : 3/13/2023 10:23:28 PM

From : "Sabrina Krawczyk"

To : "kelly.hughes@wwrsd.org" , "Kristin Gomez" , "Courtney Carmichael"

Cc : "Jill Mortimer"

Subject : FW: Important Email from Dr. Mortimer

Hi all,

I know I am not alone as a parent totally distraught over the message I received today from Dr. Mortimer. I have so many things to say but they won't come out right.

It would be my hope:

- ☐ That this will be addressed, age appropriate, with the entire student population of Brookside- shying away from issues does not make them go away
- ☐ That resources (pamphlets, newsletters, YouTube videos, etc.) on how parents can address anti-Semitism and hate in age appropriate ways in their home will be sent out tomorrow; give parents tools to help
- ☐ That my children will not be in the position for the foreseeable future as being the "Jewish" experts given that they are the only Jewish kids in their grade (that we know about) at Brookside
- ☐ That additional counseling will be brought in and offered to the entire district because I hear this is not an isolated incident and incidents like this bring up generational trauma and kids are afraid of facing additional anti-Semitism if they speak out
- ☐ That all students are told if you see something, say something and are given the process of what happens from the school if hate is expressed towards Jewish students
- ☐ That consequences are shared with the entire community much like the bullying ones were shared earlier in the year
- ☐ That this is put on the BoE agenda so the community can address their feelings early in the meeting on March 20th
- ☐ That again, you reconsider hosting the 5th grade dance at a church. This is an example of a micro-aggression that is an easy fix to show the district considers the perception of feelings of all their families.

I look forward to your responses.

Warmly,
Sabrina

From: [Westwood Regional School District](#)

Sent: Monday, March 13, 2023 4:30 PM

To: sabrinadeutsch@hotmail.com

Subject: Important Email from Dr. Mortimer



March 13, 2023

Dear WWRSD Parents:

This morning, a Brookside School parent reported finding a Swastika, **which is a symbol of hate**, on the grounds of the school. It was created with twigs, and it was about one foot long by one foot wide. We immediately reported it to the Westwood Police Department. The District Administration and Westwood Police Department worked in concert to quickly identify the individuals involved, as there was video evidence. At the writing of this email, the police investigation remains ongoing. The Principals of our other schools checked their grounds, and we did not locate additional Swastikas. Moreover, we contacted the Jewish Foundation of Northern New Jersey. They are activating their teams to provide resources and assistance to us.

This act is a hate crime; it is not freedom of speech. We have removed the Swastika to prevent exposure to this message of intolerance.

As I have said in the past, the Westwood Regional School District condemns all acts of hate, violence and intolerance. These expressions are detrimental to the well-being of all people, in all environments, and especially for children and educators in our schools. When acts such as these take place in our schools, we need to make sure people realize this does not reflect our views and beliefs, is not accepted, and will be investigated.

Your continued support in spreading a message of kindness and respect for all remains paramount in our partnership. We cannot let messages of hate darken our wonderful community.

In the meantime, please reach out to the Director of Elementary Education, Dr. Courtney Carmichael (courtney.carmichael@wwrsd.org), if you would like to share your opinions or suggestions related to this situation. However, please keep in mind she cannot share additional information with you since there is a police investigation.

We will provide more information when it becomes available.

Sincerely,

Jill Mortimer, Ed.D.

Date : 4/10/2023 4:49:11 PM
From : "Ornit N"
To : "jill.mortimer@wwrsd.org"
Subject : Fwd: Antisemitic Vandalism

Hi Dr. Mortimer

I know you are currently recovering and i do hope you are doing well.

It just came to may attention that you never actually received an email I sent back on Mar 28 (below). I am not expecting any response but wanted to make sure you had this (i have let the other parents on the chain know that there was a mistake on MY end with the distribution list) .

All the Best
Ornit

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Ornit N** <nivol234@gmail.com>

Date: Tue, Mar 28, 2023 at 10:26 PM

Subject: Antisemitic Vandalism

To:

CC: pooh1j@yahoo.com <pooh1j@yahoo.com>, NinaLaBarre@gmail.com <NinaLaBarre@gmail.com>, <nammachezar@gmail.com>, erika.goldman15@gmail.com <erika.goldman15@gmail.com>, ella.kleynerman@gmail.com <ella.kleynerman@gmail.com>, Toby Anderson <tobias.b.anderson@gmail.com>, orlyjackel@gmail.com <orlyjackel@gmail.com>, <pontillo.michael@wwrsd.org>, <pedersen.kristen@wwrsd.org>, <cooper.laura@wwrsd.org>, <cusato.douglas@wwrsd.org>, <fenarjixx.xxxxxx@xxxxxx.xxx>, <garcia.jason@wwrsd.org>, <peck.andrea@wwrsd.org>, <price.staxxx@xxxxxx.xxx>, <parrino.james@wwrsd.org>

Dear Dr. Mortimer,

We are a group of parents of Westwood/Washington School District who share concerns regarding this last antisemitic vandalism that took place by a middle schooler in Brookside Elementary school. We have been part of the Westwood/Washington community for many years and have always felt included. However, in light of the [rise in antisemitism in New Jersey and the USA](#), our primary concern is that our children and children from other marginalized groups will feel physically safe and proud in sharing their identity and culture.

We appreciate the school's quick response in cleaning the swastika and the transparency with the parents. However, we want to highlight that this incident wasn't a general bias or hate behavior but a blunt antisemitic incident. To fully address and educate our children on the dangers of antisemitism, we need to call it as it is. Therefore, as much as we support the school's initiative in implementing additional educational programs on biased behavior and hate, this is not a solution to addressing the problem at hand, which is specifically antisemitism. The students and staff must understand what antisemitism is and how it can manifest in these modern times.

We will be happy to collaborate and brainstorm on educational possibilities that can be implemented in the school. Please let us know when we will be meeting to address further collaboration."

We appreciate your prompt response and look forward to continuing this meaningful discussion.

Very truly yours,

Ornit Niv

Orly Jackel

Erika Goldman

Annie Joachim

Ella Kleynerman

Naama Chezar

Nina LaBarre

Jaime Tan

Toby Anderson

Date : 3/13/2023 3:47:24 PM
From : "Rena Barone"
To : "Jill Mortimer"
Subject : Fwd: Assistance

Do you want to answer or speak with him?



Rená Barone
Administrative Assistant - Superintendent's Office
Westwood Regional Board of Education
701 Ridgewood Road, Township of Washington, New Jersey 07676
tel: [201-664-0880](tel:201-664-0880), x2001 / fax: [201-664-7642](tel:201-664-7642)
rena.barone@wwrsd.org

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Philip Nicastro** <pnicastro@straussesmay.com>
Date: Mon, Mar 13, 2023 at 3:45 PM
Subject: RE: Assistance
To: Rena Barone <rena.barone@wwrsd.org>
Cc: Maureen Lawrence <mlawrenc@>

Rena

I would need to know more information about the incident to determine if the school has the authority to impose a consequence for out of school conduct or under the HIB law. If you want to apss on some more details or have the person that knows the details call me, that would be helpful

Phil Nicastro

From: Rena Barone <rena.barone@wwrsd.org>
Sent: Monday, March 13, 2023 3:41 PM
To: Philip Nicastro <pnicastro@straussesmay.com>
Subject: Re: Assistance

Not sure which category it would fall under, but a Swastika was found on the grounds of one of our schools that occurred this past Saturday.



Rená Barone

Administrative Assistant - Superintendent's Office

Westwood Regional Board of Education

701 Ridgewood Road, Township of Washington, New Jersey 07676

tel: [201-664-0880](tel:201-664-0880), x2001 / fax: [201-664-7642](tel:201-664-7642)

rena.barone@wwrsd.org

On Mon, Mar 13, 2023 at 3:37 PM Philip Nicastro <pnicastro@straussesmay.com> wrote:

Rena

Is the incident HIB related?

Phil Nicastro

From: Rena Barone <rena.barone@wwrsd.org>

Sent: Monday, March 13, 2023 2:19 PM

To: Maureen Lawrence <mlawrenc@twp.wa.nj.us>; Philip Nicastro
<pnicastro@straussesmay.com>

Subject: Assistance

Hello,

Hoping you can assist. We had an incident that occurred on school grounds over the weekend. Is there a policy/regulation that notes if the school is permitted to suspend for incidents that occurred when school is not in session?



Rená Barone

Administrative Assistant - Superintendent's Office

Westwood Regional Board of Education

701 Ridgewood Road, Township of Washington, New Jersey 07676

tel: [201-664-0880, x2001](tel:201-664-0880) / fax: [201-664-7642](tel:201-664-7642)

rena.barone@wwrsd.org

Confidentiality Notice: This email and any files transmitted with it are confidential and is intended solely for the use of the individual or entity to whom they are addressed. If you are not the named addressee, you should not disseminate, distribute or copy this e-mail. Please notify the sender immediately by e-mail if you have received this e-mail by mistake and delete this e-mail from your system. If you are not the intended recipient you are notified that disclosing, copying, distributing or taking any action in reliance on the contents of this information is strictly prohibited. Msg ID 714HC3IXXU1489

Date : 3/14/2023 6:24:15 PM

From : "Courtney Carmichael"

To : "Jill Mortimer"

Subject : Fwd: Education Inquiry- Westwood

Attachment : image002.png; ATT00002.bin; image003.png; ATT00004.bin; ADL NY.NJ Education Anti-Bias & Bullying Prevention Programs.pdf; ATT00006.bin; NPFH 2022_23 Resource Guide NY _ NJ.pdf; ATT00008.bin; AWOD-Peer-Training-Flier.pdf; ATT00010.bin; AWOD-Peer-Training-Flier.pdf; ATT00012.bin; ADL__Westwood_Proposal.pdf; ATT00014.bin;

I met with ADL today. Their offering are below. I can speak to them with more details tomorrow.

However, residents are reaching out to the ADL to report the incident. The rep will probably talk to them and then me tomorrow to follow up.

-Courtney Carmichael, Ed.D.

Sent from my iPhone

Begin forwarded message:

From: "Cronin, Spencer" <scroni@
Date: March 14, 2023 at 6:02:39 PM EDT
To: Courtney Carmichael <courtney.carmi@
Cc: "Katz Rubin, Brandi" <bka@
Subject: RE: Education Inquiry- Westwood

Hi Courtney,

Thank you again for taking the time to meet with us! I am attaching all the follow up items we discussed, and below is the link to the No Place for Hate waitlist for the upcoming school year.

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScxseIBhbPpPFUU4zqtassxaYuk00lrymXta4qGgXmsVerAnw/viewform?usp=share_link

Feel free to reach out if you have any questions!

Best,
Spencer

Spencer Cronin
Assistant Education Director

Pronouns: he/him
[\(why do pronouns matter?\)](#)

ADL New York/New Jersey
605 Third Avenue
New York, NY 10158-3560
C: 732-740-3244
scronin@adl.org
adl.org

Date : 3/14/2023 3:44:15 PM
From : "Jill Mortimer"
To : "Jill Mortimer" <725mortime@wwrsd.org>
Subject : Fwd: Follow Up Email from Dr. Mortimer

Sent from my iPhone

Begin forwarded message:

From: Westwood Regional School District <@wwrsd.org>
Date: March 14, 2023 at 2:08:21 PM EDT
To: jill.mortimer@wwrsd.org
Subject: Follow Up Email from Dr. Mortimer
Reply-To: donotreply@wwrsd.org



March 14, 2023

Dear Westwood Regional School District Staff and Parents:

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- ***Please know the District has conducted 36 programs on preventing harassment, intimidation and bullying this school year alone. It is a regular part of our programming, and we are committed to maintaining a welcoming environment for all of our students. We have no tolerance for hate.***
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with the District's attorney on more than one occasion to keep him abreast of the developments. Your trust in us is invaluable, and we appreciate your support during this difficult time.

Sincerely,

Jill Mortimer, Ed.D.

Date : 3/23/2023 2:45:40 PM
From : "Rena Barone"
To : "Jill Mortimer"
Subject : Fwd: Follow Up Email from Dr. Mortimer

This was the follow-up communication...



Rená Barone
Administrative Assistant - Superintendent's Office
Westwood Regional Board of Education
701 Ridgewood Road, Township of Washington, New Jersey 07676
tel: [201-664-0880](tel:201-664-0880), x2001 / fax: [201-664-7642](tel:201-664-7642)
rena.barone@wwrsd.org

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Westwood Regional School District** <donotreply@wwrsd.org>
Date: Tue, Mar 14, 2023 at 2:08 PM
Subject: Follow Up Email from Dr. Mortimer
To: <rena.barone@wwrsd.org>



March 14, 2023

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- Director of Elementary Education Dr. Carmichael contacted the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), and we are speaking to them about their "No Place for Hate" programming for each of our six schools. We want to create awareness about the impact of bias behavior.
- ***Please know the District has conducted 36 programs on preventing harassment, intimidation and bullying this school year alone. It is a regular part of our programming, and we are committed to maintaining a welcoming environment for all of our students. We have no tolerance for hate.***
- We just implemented the Responsive Classroom program in the elementary schools this school year, and we intend to expand it to the middle grades next year. The Morning Meeting Responsive Classroom practices consists of everyone in the classroom gathering in a circle at the beginning of each school day and proceeding through four sequential components: greeting, sharing, group activity, and morning message. At the middle school level, morning meetings are replaced by advisory lessons which share the same core beliefs as morning meetings, but with a developmentally appropriate

approach. In fact, advisory lessons are already taking place at the middle school. Core beliefs associated with the program include cooperation, assertiveness, responsibility, empathy and self-control.

October Bias Incident in the High School

There has been speculation on social media that the District did not respond to another anti-semitic act that happened in October. That is not accurate. Here is an excerpt from the staff/parent letter that I issued on October 6, 2022:

“The District determined a ***non-District minor’s*** Internet Protocol (IP) address likely infiltrated one of our student’s accounts. This information was provided to the Township of Washington Police Department, and they are consulting with the Bergen County Cyber Crimes Unit.”

The offender was ***NOT*** one of our students. Therefore, the District did not have authority to punish that individual. However, we readily cooperated with the law enforcement investigation. I am not able to divulge the result of the police investigation because as I said, I cannot speak on their behalf. Moreover, High School Principal Mr. Connelly addressed what happened with students by saying, in part, “as a member of this community as a resident and the Principal, I am appalled by the absolute disregard for human decency and respect. I truly apologize for the fact that you witnessed this. This type of behavior is unacceptable, and it does not live up to the values of the Westwood Regional School District. I know we are better than this! Instead of letting this situation bring us down, let’s take it as an opportunity to be better, kinder, more accepting and compassionate, and more empathetic towards each other. If you are struggling in any way, please do not hesitate to reach out to your counselor or myself. I take great pride in having an open door policy for all of our students. I leave you with this quote from Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. “I have decided to stick with love. Hate is too great a burden to bear.””

In closing, please continue to have faith in the District’s leadership. We have followed the appropriate steps in the Department of Education’s guide for responding to hate incidents and bias-related acts. Furthermore, I have consulted with the District’s attorney on more than one occasion to keep him abreast of the developments. Your trust in us is invaluable, and we appreciate your support during this difficult time.

Sincerely,

Jill Mortimer, Ed.D.

Date : 3/13/2023 10:46:35 AM

From : "Jill Mortimer"

To : "Michael Pontillo" , "Kristen Pedersen" , "Stacey Price" , "Andrea Peck" , "Laura Cooper" , "Douglas Cusato" , "Jason Garcia" , "Irene Fenarjian" , "James Parrino"

Cc : "Rena Barone"

Subject : Fwd: IMG_8036-preview.pvt

Attachment : IMG_8036.heic;

Good Morning,

This morning, a parent reported seeing a swastika on Brookside School property. The Administrator photographed it and then scratched it out so that students would not see it. We reported it to the Westwood Police Department, and we are checking our cameras. It may or may not have been one of our students, so we should not jump to conclusions.

I am preparing a parent/staff letter, and we will contact the Jewish Foundation of Northern NJ.

The picture is attached. You will hear more from me later once we have a better handle on the situation. Everything is very fluid right now.

Sent from my iPhone

--

***Jill Mortimer, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools
Westwood Regional School District
701 Ridgewood Road
Township of Washington, New Jersey 07676
201-664-0880 x2001***

Date : 3/13/2023 7:27:51 PM
From : "Jill Mortimer"
To : "Jill Mortimer" <725mortime@wwrsd.org>
Subject : Fwd: Important Email from Dr. Mortimer

Sent from my iPhone

Begin forwarded message:

From: Westwood Regional School District <@wwrsd.org>
Date: March 13, 2023 at 4:30:53 PM EDT
To: jill.mortimer@wwrsd.org
Subject: Important Email from Dr. Mortimer
Reply-To: donotreply@wwrsd.org



March 13, 2023

Dear WWRSD Parents:

This morning, a Brookside School parent reported finding a Swastika, ***which is a symbol of hate***, on the grounds of the school. It was created with twigs, and it was about one foot long by one foot wide. We immediately reported it to the Westwood Police Department. The District Administration and Westwood Police Department worked in concert to quickly identify the individuals involved, as there was video evidence. At the writing of this email, the police investigation remains ongoing. The Principals of our other schools checked their grounds, and we did not locate additional Swastikas. Moreover, we contacted the Jewish Foundation of Northern New Jersey. They are activating their teams to provide resources and assistance to us.

This act is a hate crime; it is not freedom of speech. We have removed the Swastika to prevent exposure to this message of intolerance.

As I have said in the past, the Westwood Regional School District condemns all acts of hate, violence and intolerance. These expressions are detrimental to the well-being of all people, in all environments, and especially for children and educators in our schools. When acts such as these take place in our schools, we need to make sure people realize this does not reflect our views and beliefs, is not accepted, and will be investigated.

Your continued support in spreading a message of kindness and respect for all remains paramount in our partnership. We cannot let messages of hate darken our wonderful community.

In the meantime, please reach out to the Director of Elementary Education, Dr. Courtney Carmichael (courtney.carmichael@wwrsd.org), if you would like to share your opinions or suggestions related to this situation. However, please keep in mind she cannot share additional information with you since there is a police investigation.

We will provide more information when it becomes available.

Sincerely,

Jill Mortimer, Ed.D.

Date : 3/23/2023 2:45:11 PM

From : "Rena Barone"

To : "Jill Mortimer"

Subject : Fwd: Website Message: You have a message from Stephanie Noda

Attachment : image001.jpg;

See The Record's 2nd request below...

We can discuss/confirm tomorrow, but you sent a follow-up email to Staff/Parents on March 14. Do you want me to send that in letter form to her as well?



Rená Barone

Administrative Assistant - Superintendent's Office

Westwood Regional Board of Education

701 Ridgewood Road, Township of Washington, New Jersey 07676

tel: [201-664-0880, x2001](tel:201-664-0880) / fax: [201-664-7642](tel:201-664-7642)

rena.barone@wwrsd.org

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Noda, Stephanie** <Noda@northjersey.com>

Date: Thu, Mar 23, 2023 at 2:36 PM

Subject: RE: Website Message: You have a message from Stephanie Noda

To: Rena Barone <rena.barone@wwrsd.org>

Thank you Rena, I appreciate it! I was listening to the last board meeting and there was a parent that mentioned this was the second instance of a swastika found this year and was wondering if there was another community letter or statement from Dr. Mortimer about the steps the district may have been taking since then (I'm not sure what date it occurred since it wasn't discussed in detail). Thanks.

Stephanie Noda

Staff Writer



Office: 973-558-0950

noda@northjersey.com

From: Rena Barone <rena.barone@wwrsd.org>
Sent: Wednesday, March 22, 2023 3:59 PM
To: Noda, Stephanie <Noda@northjersey.com>
Subject: Re: Website Message: You have a message from Stephanie Noda

Good afternoon Ms. Noda,

As requested, is the correspondence sent to Staff/Parents on March 13 from Dr. Mortimer. Thank you.



Rená Barone
Administrative Assistant - Superintendent's Office
Westwood Regional Board of Education
701 Ridgewood Road, Township of Washington, New Jersey 07676
tel: [201-664-0880](tel:201-664-0880), x2001 / fax: [201-664-7642](tel:201-664-7642)
rena.barone@wwrsd.org

On Wed, Mar 22, 2023 at 1:10 PM Thrillshare <no-reply@apptegy.com> wrote:

Sender: Stephanie Noda
Sender IP Address: 173.63.119.140
To reply to this message, use reply email noda@northjersey.com

Good afternoon,

My name is Stephanie Noda, a reporter from The Record newspaper. I'm reaching out because I was hoping to get a copy of a community letter that was sent out on Monday regarding the finding of swastikas at a school in the district. If you could send the letter, or any other statement from Superintendent Mortimer about the situation, to noda@northjersey.com, I'd appreciate it. Thank you.

This message was sent from the messaging service on your website via Thrillshare on

03/22/23 12:10 PM CDT

Date : 3/13/2023 7:06:45 PM
From : "Elyse Scileppi"
To : "Jill Mortimer"
Subject : Hate incidents

Dear Dr. Mortimer,

As a parent of children in the district, I am concerned with recent events including the Swastika discovered at Brookside School. How is the district addressing this incident? Also, what programs are being put in place to educate students on the importance of inclusivity (race, religion, gender, etc)?

Thank you,
Elyse Scileppi

Sent from my iPhone

Date : 3/13/2023 3:21:06 PM
From : "Jill Mortimer"
To : "District All"
Subject : Important Email from Dr. Mortimer

Dear WWRSd Staff:

This morning, a Brookside School parent reported finding a Swastika, ***which is a symbol of hate***, on the grounds of the school. It was created with twigs, and it was about one foot long by one foot wide. We immediately reported it to the Westwood Police Department. The District Administration and Westwood Police Department worked in concert to quickly identify the individuals involved, as there was video evidence. At the writing of this email, the police investigation remains ongoing. The Principals of our other schools checked their grounds, and we did not locate additional Swastikas. Moreover, we contacted the Jewish Foundation of Northern New Jersey. They are activating their teams to provide resources and assistance to us.

This act is a hate crime; it is not freedom of speech. We have removed the Swastika to prevent exposure to this message of intolerance.

As I have said in the past, the Westwood Regional School District condemns all acts of hate, violence and intolerance. These expressions are detrimental to the well-being of all people, in all environments, and especially for children and educators in our schools. When acts such as these take place in our schools, we need to make sure people realize this does not reflect our views and beliefs, is not accepted, and will be investigated.

Your continued support in spreading a message of kindness and respect for all remains paramount in our partnership. We cannot let messages of hate darken our wonderful community.

In the meantime, please reach out to the Director of Elementary Education, Dr. Courtney Carmichael (courtney.carmichael@wwrsd.org), if you would like to share your opinions or suggestions related to this situation. However, please keep in mind she cannot share additional information with you since there is a police investigation.

We will provide more information when it becomes available.
Thank you.

--

Jill Mortimer, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools
Westwood Regional School District

***701 Ridgewood Road
Township of Washington, New Jersey 07676
201-664-0880 x2001***

Date : 3/13/2023 8:53:55 AM

From : "Christina Scaduto"

To : jill.mortimer@wwrsd.org

Subject : Out of the Office Re: Swastika found on Brookside Property



Christina Scaduto, Principal
christina.scaduto@wwrsd.org

Jessie F. George School
1 Palm Street
Township of Washington, NJ 07882

Tel: 201.664.3033
Fax: 201.722.0670

Thank you for your email. I am currently facilitating co-teaching professional development. If this is an emergency, please contact the main office at 201-664-3033 or I will respond to your email as soon I can.

Thank you.

Have a great day!
Mrs. Christina Scaduto

--

Christina Scaduto
Principal



JESSIE F. GEORGE
ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION

Date : 4/17/2023 6:14:45 PM

From : "Sarah"

To : ken.rota@wwrsd.org, "kenneth.rota@wwrsd.org" , "Jill Mortimer" , "Jason Garcia" , "Stacey Price" , "Laura Cooper" , "Irene Fenarjian" , pedersen.kristen@wwrsd.org, "Andrea Peck" , parrino.james@wwrsd.org, cusato.douglas@wwrsd.org, pontillo.michael@wwrsd.org

Subject : Parent Notification

Mr. Rota and WWRSD BOE,

Welcome to the district, Mr. Rota. I wanted to share some feedback regarding an incident that recently occurred in my son's 5th grade class at Berkeley Elementary School.

A couple of weeks before spring break, my son asked to speak with me privately after school. He told me about something that happened in his classroom that was scary and upsetting to him, and then made me promise not to tell anyone, including my husband/his father. The story is not worth repeating because I don't know what the truth is, and I'm sure you're all aware of the actual events that took place.

When he told me what happened (from what he saw and what he was told by a student involved), it sounded so outlandish that I told him it couldn't have happened because the school would have notified the parents. He was upset that I didn't believe him and when he insisted, I told him, again, that if anything happened I would hear about it, officially, from the district. Since I never heard anything and was later approached by another parent, I reached out to his teacher and to Principal Fiorello. They were sympathetic and unable to disclose any details.

I would love more clarification as to when incidents are shared with parents and when they are not. I have emails from the district regarding a fight at the high school from earlier in the year, empty shell casings found at Brookside School, and a swastika made of twigs found on school grounds at Brookside School. The 1/10/23 email regarding the empty shell casings incident said "Parental and staff notification by the school was not performed at that time because there was no perceived or actual threat," but ultimately, as it was an item of public concern it was shared. Does the Berkeley incident fall under "no perceived or actual threat" as well? And if an incident isn't disclosed to parents, does that mean educators are not permitted to offer students support? The school emails/calls when either of my children have visited the nurse. I was notified when one son was giggling too much in class and being distracting, when one forgot his homework, when one had an exceptionally great day. But not one word about this.

With students' mental wellbeing a district focus (we have responsive classrooms and there's an open role for a director of school counseling and wellness services position), I feel like the district's response to this incident has fallen flat. Wherever the truth lies, there was an opportunity to dispel rumors, calm student fears, offer support, and tell parents so they can further support their kids if needed. Did you know a group of the kids decided to make a pact not to tell any adult? Because no trusted school educator took the time to take their mental health into account, they spent their recess time trying to make sense of what happened and deciding what to do. How sad is it that kids felt they had to keep this a secret. That's dangerous.

The incident may not be a big deal to adults, but to 10/11-year-olds who have the perception that a very violent event almost took place in their school, this is a big deal to them. My son's friend was crying. A backpack was searched. An allegation made. Kids being taken out of the classroom. He said Mr. Fiorello looked very worried and that it worried him. This was a big deal to these kids. This happened right in front of them. And further, not addressing issues like this can lead to bullying as some of the kids decided they should ignore the student for their own safety. If they don't feel protected, they think they need to

protect themselves.

Please know that for many kids in today's day and age, including my own, school violence is a very real source of anxiety. They've heard the stories on the news. They participate in regular active shooting drills. They are very aware. The district had the opportunity to talk to students, acknowledge fears, and alleviate future concerns by sharing safety protocols, talking to them about how the officer on duty will keep them safe, etc. Instead no one talked to them. And no one let the parents know so parents could address it at home.

Whether this matter falls under the parents "need to know or don't need to know" per the district, I'd ask each of you if your child came home and told you this, would you be ok with how it was handled? Would you be ok hearing this from your child and not from the school? I'm very disappointed.

Sincerely,
Sarah Urscheler

Date : 3/13/2023 3:49:11 PM
From : "Rena Barone"
To : "Philip Nicastro"
Cc : "Maureen Lawrence"
BCc : jill.mortimer@wwrsd.org
Subject : Re: Assistance

Dr. Mortimer is currently in a meeting, however, can we set up a time to call you in the morning to discuss?



Rená Barone
Administrative Assistant - Superintendent's Office
Westwood Regional Board of Education
701 Ridgewood Road, Township of Washington, New Jersey 07676
tel: [201-664-0880](tel:201-664-0880), x2001 / fax: [201-664-7642](tel:201-664-7642)
rena.barone@wwrsd.org

On Mon, Mar 13, 2023 at 3:45 PM Philip Nicastro <pnicastro@straussesmay.com> wrote:

Rena

I would need to know more information about the incident to determine if the school has the authority to impose a consequence for out of school conduct or under the HIB law. If you want to apss on some more details or have the person that knows the details call me, that would be helpful

Phil Nicastro

From: Rena Barone <rena.barone@wwrsd.org>
Sent: Monday, March 13, 2023 3:41 PM
To: Philip Nicastro <pnicastro@straussesmay.com>
Subject: Re: Assistance

Not sure which category it would fall under, but a Swastika was found on the grounds of one of our schools that occurred this past Saturday.



Rená Barone

Administrative Assistant - Superintendent's Office

Westwood Regional Board of Education

701 Ridgewood Road, Township of Washington, New Jersey 07676

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rena.barone@wwrsd.org

On Mon, Mar 13, 2023 at 3:37 PM Philip Nicastro <pnicastro@straussesmay.com> wrote:

Rena

Is the incident HIB related?

Phil Nicastro

From: Rena Barone <rena.barone@wwrsd.org>

Sent: Monday, March 13, 2023 2:19 PM

To: Maureen Lawrence <mlawrenc@twp.wa.nj.us>, Philip Nicastro
<pnicastro@straussesmay.com>

Subject: Assistance

Hello,

Hoping you can assist. We had an incident that occurred on school grounds over the weekend. Is there a policy/regulation that notes if the school is permitted to suspend for incidents that occurred when school is not in session?



Rená Barone

Administrative Assistant - Superintendent's Office

Westwood Regional Board of Education

701 Ridgewood Road, Township of Washington, New Jersey 07676

tel: [201-664-0880, x2001](tel:201-664-0880) / fax: [201-664-7642](tel:201-664-7642)
rena.barone@wwrsd.org

Confidentiality Notice: This email and any files transmitted with it are confidential and is intended solely for the use of the individual or entity to whom they are addressed. If you are not the named addressee, you should not disseminate, distribute or copy this e-mail. Please notify the sender immediately by e-mail if you have received this e-mail by mistake and delete this e-mail from your system. If you are not the intended recipient you are notified that disclosing, copying, distributing or taking any action in reliance on the contents of this information is strictly prohibited. Msg ID 714HC3IXXU1489

Date : 3/14/2023 8:29:45 AM
From : "Jason Garcia"
To : "Jill Mortimer"
Subject : Re: BoE FYI - 3/14/23
Thank you, Jill.

Jay Garcia
(646) 206-1049

On Mar 14, 2023, at 8:19 AM, Jill Mortimer <jill.xxxxxxxx@xxxxx.xxx> wrote:

Good Morning, BoE Members.

Here is an update on the unfortunate situation at Brookside yesterday:

- ☐ The police investigation has concluded. I cannot speak to what they determined or whether the Bergen County Prosecutor's Office is involved. That is not my role.
- ☐ The actor was a single juvenile. I cannot share any information about the individual, including whether the juvenile is a student in our District. However, I can alleviate concern by saying it was not a student at Brookside School.
- ☐ If it were a student in our District, I would not be able to discipline the child because this happened on Saturday afternoon. I can only punish off campus/hours conduct if it causes a *substantial disruption in the school*. That did not occur because as far as I know, only two adults saw the swastika. The requirement, legally, is that there has to be a nexus to the school, according to Vic (District Attorney).
- ☐ Had the swastika was discovered in the school, I would refer to [Regulation 5600](#). The infraction would be "Bias Language," which comes with a first offense penalty of a one-day out-of-school suspension, referral to school counseling, and a possible HIB finding. I will put this topic on the agenda for the next Policy Committee meeting because we should change the language to say Bias Language or Symbol. The committee members can also review the discipline imposed to determine whether they feel what is written is appropriate.
- ☐ Dr. Carmichael and Ms. Calderon will be in charge of determining the educational programming that will come as a result of this. Last I heard, Dr. Carmichael has not received a return call from the North Jersey Jewish Federation. I will meet with Courtney and Bronwen this morning, and we will be actively developing a plan today. I saw on Facebook some Brookside parents want to do an assembly for the students on this topic. Please know that will be politely declined, as we need professionals who are trained in addressing this topic appropriately.
- ☐ I will put another parent/staff letter out once I have an action plan. Hopefully this will be today or tomorrow morning at the latest. I'm on it.

Take care.

--

Jill Mortimer, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools
Westwood Regional School District
701 Ridgewood Road

Township of Washington, New Jersey 07676
201-664-0880 x2001

Date : 6/15/2023 3:47:28 PM
From : "Jill Mortimer"
To : "Sarah"
Subject : Re: District Feedback

Hello Mrs. Urscheler,

Thank you for your email and for expressing your concerns. I appreciate the feedback. Take care.

On Wed, Jun 14, 2023 at 11:39 AM Sarah <simplysarah@gmail.com> wrote:
Hi, Dr. Mortimer,

Welcome back. I hope you are feeling well. I know you are likely going through hundreds of emails, if not more, as you return. I had emailed the board of education and Mr. Rota several times while you were out and tried to cc you on my communications for awareness.

I just wanted to share my perspective with you and my hope that, with your return, the district can unite and move forward.

Board of Education Conduct

I have been largely disappointed with the conduct of several board members, both at meetings and on social media. In my opinion, they are driving the biggest divide within the community. To be frank, I voted, over the past few years, for all of the current Westwood board members. I had faith in them. And now I feel really hoodwinked. They are having difficulty working together, they are contradicting themselves, they are not transparent at all, and they don't seem to care what the public majority thinks. Online, Doug Cusato and Kristen Pedersen have said very awful things to community members who share differing views. Doug Cusato has also referenced banning books and doing all he can to prevent a "woke" school agenda, whatever that is. He also spreads misinformation on topics like the health curriculum. Kristen Pederson is a moderator on a closed Facebook group where district rumors swirl, conspiracy theories abound, and incorrect information is shared. Please know that at times your name is brought up on a first name basis. For example, regarding the health curriculum, one community member said something like 'Let Jill know' or 'We'll tell Jill.' This implies a personal relationship, and, I think that could be taken the wrong way. Regarding the board, I don't feel the board majority represents my family or has any desire to do anything other than focus on their own personal agendas. I have been disappointed in Mike Pontillo's leadership, especially in the way he speaks to some board members and community members. They need an intervention, more training, and they need to be held accountable. Aren't there rules against the way they use social media? I also emailed Mr. Rota because, based on the conduct of some of these board members, I do not want my children interacting with them within their classrooms. In September I will send an email to the school principals asking I be informed ahead of time when any board member is invited into their classroom, for example to read during Read Across America Week. With their recent conduct, I do not want them near my children.

Ad-Hoc Committee

A huge waste of time and resources. Pontillo is also not being transparent at all as he has not even publicly stated what the true purpose of the committee is. A very small number of students have opted out of specific lesson plans. This is a state-mandated curriculum and this was already approved by the BOE and put in place. Why are we focusing on this? Again, it's based on the personal agendas of a few board members.

Flag Policy

I understand you will be sharing your position on this with the district. My two cents is the language in

this new policy doesn't reference lawn signs, and, this is a dangerous road I'd rather not see our district go down. I don't agree with the stance but if it is the position of the district, the language in the policy needs to change and no signs (teacher appreciation, read across america, happy birthday, congrats grads) should be permitted either. I would rather see the district allow the Pride flag sign as that would send a strong message to our students that the district hears them, acknowledges them, and supports them.

Berkley 5th Grade Classroom Incident

I reached out to you about this just as you went on leave so you may not have seen my email. There was an incident in my son's 5th grade classroom back in April. I have spoken with Mr. Fiorello and my son's teacher to share my thoughts but I wanted you to know I am very disappointed in the way it was handled. I still don't have the factual information of what happened but I want you to know my son and other students were really disturbed by it. Since no one (teacher, principal, guidance counselor, SLEO) spoke to the kids after, it left many kids feeling confused and scared. And since parents weren't informed, we missed the opportunity to alleviate our children's fears. My son sits in a responsive classroom. I am informed when he has a great day or a bad day. He, and classmates, were spoken to no less than 4 times over the span of a few days when they misbehaved for a substitute media teacher. And yet this incident happened and no one spoke with them. No one told parents. Please know that my son is being treated for anxiety and one of the fears he shared with his doctor is his fear of school violence. This incident hit close to home for him and the district dropped the ball on a great opportunity to help these students through a scary situation. I asked Mr. Rota to clarify when parents are told of incidents as I couldn't find anything in the Parent Handbook and because I had received an email for a fight at the high school (I have no high school students) as well as a swastika made of twigs at Brookside school. Mr. Rota told me there is no specific policy and it is up to the discretion of the administration. I implore you to reconsider this and to put in writing the rules around when and why parents are notified of in-school incidents.

Book Banning

Cusato has been very vocal on social media about his views that not all library books should be available to children. He has stated online "First history books, then the library. It's going to be a busy few months." I am not interested in seeing this district go down this path of censoring. If Cusato doesn't want his kids to read something, that's on him. He and other board members seem to not understand that many parents do want him making decisions for all kids. I've been watching what's been happening in Roxbury and I dread that's the road he, Pederson, Pontillo, Price, Fenarjian, and Parrino are dragging us down.

Eight years ago my husband and I bought our house in Westwood. It reminded me of everything I liked about Ramsey where I grew up - the walkable downtown, the tight-knit community, the good schools. But it had one thing Ramsey didn't - diversity. In my oldest son's kindergarten year, Berkeley was named a Blue Ribbon School. I was so happy that we chose to put our roots down here. But in just a few years things have changed, drastically, for the worse. I see a divided community, personal agendas at play, shameful conduct, lack of transparency. The ironic thing is that Ramsey High School, right now, is flying a Pride flag alongside the US flag in front of the school. All of this leaves me wondering if I've made the wrong choice for my family.

I am hopeful that you have the ability to get everything back on track. Should the board of education continue down this path, it would no longer be in the best interest of my children to attend the WWRSD district. I am hoping that it doesn't come down to that but my children are my priority and I do not want them raised in a small-minded, backwards-moving school district and community.

Thank you for your time,
Sarah Urscheler

--

Jill Mortimer, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools
Westwood Regional School District
701 Ridgewood Road
Township of Washington, New Jersey 07676
201-664-0880 x2001

Date : 3/13/2023 3:45:32 PM

From : "Douglas Cusato"

To : "Jill Mortimer"

Subject : Re: Document shared with you: "March 13"

Jill,

Maybe it's just the picture, but it's that backwards? I believe there are some religions that celebrate such swastika's as a positive thing and weren't specifically linked with the nazi hate crimes.

Get [Outlook for iOS](#)

From: Jill Mortimer (via Google Docs) <drive-shares-dm-noreply@google.com>

Sent: Monday, March 13, 2023 2:46:23 PM

To: cusato.douglas@wwrsd.org; cusato.douglas@wwrsd.org

Cc: cooper.laura@wwrsd.org <cooper.laura@wwrsd.org>; fenarjian.iren@wwrsd.org <fenarjian.irene@wwrsd.org>; garcia.jason@wwrsd.org <garcia.jason@wwrsd.org>; parrino.james@wwrsd.org <parrino.j@wwrsd.org>; peck.andrea@wwrsd.org <peck.andrea@wwrsd.org>; pedersen.kristen@wwrsd.org <pedersen.kristen@wwrsd.org>; pontillo.michael@wwrsd.org <pontillo.michael@wwrsd.org>; price.stacey@wwrsd.org <price.stacey@wwrsd.org>

Subject: Document shared with you: "March 13"

Jill Mortimer shared a document



Jill Mortimer (jill.mortimer@wwrsd.org) has invited you to **view** the following document:

FYI. This message is going out shortly.



March 13

[Open](#)

Google LLC, 1600 Amphitheatre Parkway, Mountain View, CA 94043, USA
You have received this email because jill.mortimer@wwrsd.org shared a document with you from Google Docs.

Google Workspace

Date : 3/15/2023 12:58:03 PM
From : "Jill Mortimer"
To : "Courtney Carmichael"
Subject : Re: Education Inquiry- Westwood

Do they have assemblies for students?

On Tue, Mar 14, 2023 at 6:24 PM Courtney Carmichael <courtney.carmichael@wwrsd.org> wrote:

I met with ADL today. Their offering are below. I can speak to them with more details tomorrow.

However, residents are reaching out to the ADL to report the incident. The rep will probably talk to them and then me tomorrow to follow up.

-Courtney Carmichael, Ed.D.
Sent from my iPhone

Begin forwarded message:

From: "Cronin, Spencer" <scronin@adl.org>
Date: March 14, 2023 at 6:02:39 PM EDT
To: Courtney Carmichael <courtney.carmichael@wwrsd.org>
Cc: "Katz Rubin, Brandi" <bkatzrubix@xxx.xxx>
Subject: RE: Education Inquiry- Westwood

Hi Courtney,

Thank you again for taking the time to meet with us! I am attaching all the follow up items we discussed, and below is the link to the No Place for Hate waitlist for the upcoming school year.

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScxseIBhbPpPFUU4zqtassxaYuk00lrymXta4qGgXmsVerAnw/viewform?usp=share_link

Feel free to reach out if you have any questions!

Best,

Spencer

Spencer Cronin

Assistant Education Director

Pronouns: he/him

[\(why do pronouns matter?\)](#)

ADL New York/New Jersey
605 Third Avenue
New York, NY 10158-3560
C: 732-740-3244
scronin@adl.org
adl.org

From: Katz Rubin, Brandi <bkatzrubix@xxx.xxx>
Sent: Tuesday, March 14, 2023 5:32 PM
To: Courtney Carmichael <courtney.carmichael@wwrsd.org>
Cc: Cronin, Spencer <scronin@adl.org>
Subject: RE: Education Inquiry- Westwood

Hi Courtney,

It was so nice to meet you virtually today. Thank you for your time. I just wanted to let you know that we are starting to receive incident reports from parents who are concerned about the incident at the elementary school. I will probably want to schedule a follow-up call with you after I speak to the parents, just to make sure everyone's concerns are addressed. I will be in touch. And of course, reach out if you need anything from me.

With thanks,

Brandi

Brandi Katz Rubin

Senior Associate Regional Director

New York/New Jersey Region

Pronouns: she/her

ADL

605 Third Avenue

New York, NY 10158-3560

o: 212.885.5841

c: 646.532.7376

bkatzrubix@xxx.xxx

www.adl.org

From: NoPlaceForeHate_NYNJ <noplaceforhate_nynj@adl.org>

Sent: Tuesday, March 14, 2023 12:51 PM

To: Courtney Carmichael <courtney.carmichael@wwrsd.org>

Cc: Katz Rubin, Brandi <bkatzrubix@xxx.xxx>

Subject: Re: Education Inquiry

Hi Courtney,

Can we switch this to a Zoom meeting? I'd like to include my Regional Operations colleague, Brandi (copied here). We read about the recent discovery of a swastika on the grounds of Brookside Elementary and want to highlight a few additional ways we can support you when things like this happen.

Are there any times that would work for you this week?

Best,

Spencer

From: Courtney Carmichael <courtney.carmichael@wwrsd.org>

Sent: Tuesday, March 14, 2023 9:14 AM

To: NoPlaceForeHate_NYNJ <noplaceforhate_nynj@adl.org>

Subject: Re: Education Inquiry

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of the organization. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

Yes, my number is 201.664.0880 ext 2015.

Dr. Courtney Carmichael, she/her/hers

Director of Elementary Education

Westwood Regional School District

701 Ridgewood Road

Township of Washington, NJ 07676

"Diversity is about all of us, and about us having to figure out how to walk through this world together." ~Jacqueline Woodson

On Tue, Mar 14, 2023 at 9:12 AM NoPlaceForeHate_NYNJ
<noplaceforhate_nynj@adl.org> wrote:

Dear Courtney,

Thank you for reaching out to ADL NY/NJ! My name is Spencer Cronin and I am the Assistant Education Director overseeing No Place for Hate in New Jersey. I would love to find a time to connect and talk through the program. Are you available at all this week?

Best,

Spencer

From: ADL NOREPLY <noreply@adl.org>
Sent: Monday, March 13, 2023 6:38 PM
To: Charette, Rachel <rcharetxx@xxx.xxx>
Cc: No Place For Hate Albany <NPFH_Albaxx@xxx.xxx>;
NoPlaceForeHate_NYNJ <noplaceforhate_nynj@adl.org>
Subject: Education Inquiry

A constituent has submitted an ADL Education inquiry.
The details are below:

Submitted on: 3/13/2023

Join the movement (NFPH program Lead):

What best describes you? Administrator

Name: Courtney Carmichael

Email: courtney.carmichael@wwrsd.org

Phone Number: 201.664.0880 ext 2015

City: Yep of Washington

Name of School (if applicable): Westwood
Regional

State/Province: New Jersey

Zip/Postal Code: 07646

**Short description of why you would like to
engage in No Place for Hate:** Good program



ADL
605 Third Ave New York, NY 10153, USA
© [Anti-Defamation League](#). All rights reserved.

--

Jill Mortimer, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools
Westwood Regional School District
701 Ridgewood Road
Township of Washington, New Jersey 07676
201-664-0880 x2001

Date : 3/14/2023 2:27:49 PM
From : "Andrew Gerstmayr"
To : "Jill Mortimer"
Subject : Re: Follow Up Email from Dr. Mortimer

Dear Dr. Mortimer,

Many thanks for the clear and informative communication surrounding this incident on the Brookside school grounds. The transparency and level of detail is greatly appreciated, especially the inclusion of Regulation 5600. The slight adjustment to the wording of that infraction is a very good idea moving forward.

Have a great day,
Andrew

On Tue, Mar 14, 2023 at 2:08 PM Westwood Regional School District
<donotreply@wwrsd.org> wrote:



March 14, 2023

Dear Westwood Regional School District Staff and Parents:

I sincerely hope you and your family members are well. I am writing today to provide an update on the swastika that was found on the grounds of Brookside School on Monday morning. We have both short-term and long-term goals for addressing this incident.

Status of the Investigation

- ☐ The incident took place on Saturday afternoon (March 11).
- ☐ The police investigation has concluded. I cannot speak to what they determined or whether the Bergen County Prosecutor's Office is involved. I do not have authorization to speak on their behalf, and it would be inappropriate for me to do so.
- ☐ The actor was a single juvenile. I cannot share any information about the individual, including whether the juvenile is a student in our District. However, I can alleviate concern by saying it was not a student at Brookside School.
- ☐ The students and staff in Brookside School are safe, and there is no threat to them as a result of this hate incident.

How the District is Handling the Bias Incident

- If it were a student in our District, we would not be able to discipline the individual because this happened on Saturday afternoon. We can only punish off campus/after hours conduct if it causes a *substantial disruption* with the orderly operation of *the school*. According to New Jersey Administrative Code 6A:16-7.5, it would have to *materially and substantially interfere with the requirements of appropriate discipline in the operation of the school*. That did not occur because two adults were the only ones who saw the swastika. I realize some of you may not be pleased with this, and I readily acknowledge the image created a substantial disruption in the community.
- Had the swastika created a substantial disruption *in the school*, I would refer to [Regulation 5600](#). The infraction would be "Bias Language," which comes with a first offense penalty of a one-day out-of-school suspension, referral to school counseling, and a possible HIB finding. I will put this topic on the agenda for the next Policy Committee meeting because the Board should expand the language to say Bias Language or Symbol. The Administration and committee members will review the discipline called for to determine whether they feel what is written is appropriate.

Action Plan for Addressing Hate in our Schools

- We heard back from the Jewish Federation of Northern New Jersey, and they complimented our handling of the bias incident to date.
- I contacted the Bergen County Prosecutor's Office to request an educational presentation for middle and high school students on Bias Crimes. Both Dr. Ferlise and Mr. Connelly scheduled student presentations with a detective from that office. The High School one is tentatively slated for March 24, and the middle school presentation will be held in March as well.
- Director of Elementary Education Dr. Carmichael contacted the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), and we are speaking to them about their "No Place for Hate" programming for each of our six schools. We want to create awareness about the impact of bias behavior.
- ***Please know the District has conducted 36 programs on preventing harassment, intimidation and bullying this school year alone. It is a regular part of our programming, and we are committed to maintaining a welcoming environment for all of our students. We have no tolerance for hate.***
- We just implemented the Responsive Classroom program in the elementary schools this school year, and we intend to expand it to the middle grades next year. The Morning Meeting Responsive Classroom practices consists of everyone in the classroom gathering in a circle at the beginning of each school day and proceeding through four sequential components: greeting, sharing, group activity, and morning message. At the middle school level, morning meetings are replaced by advisory lessons which share the same core beliefs as morning meetings, but with a developmentally appropriate approach. In fact, advisory lessons are already taking place at the middle school. Core beliefs associated with the program include cooperation, assertiveness, responsibility, empathy and self-control.

October Bias Incident in the High School

There has been speculation on social media that the District did not respond to another anti-semitic act that happened in October. That is not accurate. Here is an excerpt from the staff/parent letter that I issued on October 6, 2022:

“The District determined a ***non-District minor’s*** Internet Protocol (IP) address likely infiltrated one of our student’s accounts. This information was provided to the Township of Washington Police Department, and they are consulting with the Bergen County Cyber Crimes Unit.”

The offender was ***NOT*** one of our students. Therefore, the District did not have authority to punish that individual. However, we readily cooperated with the law enforcement investigation. I am not able to divulge the result of the police investigation because as I said, I cannot speak on their behalf. Moreover, High School Principal Mr. Connelly addressed what happened with students by saying, in part, “as a member of this community as a resident and the Principal, I am appalled by the absolute disregard for human decency and respect. I truly apologize for the fact that you witnessed this. This type of behavior is unacceptable, and it does not live up to the values of the Westwood Regional School District. I know we are better than this! Instead of letting this situation bring us down, let's take it as an opportunity to be better, kinder, more accepting and compassionate, and more empathetic towards each other. If you are struggling in any way, please do not hesitate to reach out to your counselor or myself. I take great pride in having an open door policy for all of our students. I leave you with this quote from Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. “I have decided to stick with love. Hate is too great a burden to bear.”

In closing, please continue to have faith in the District’s leadership. We have followed the appropriate steps in the Department of Education’s guide for responding to hate incidents and bias-related acts. Furthermore, I have consulted with the District’s attorney on more than one occasion to keep him abreast of the developments. Your trust in us is invaluable, and we appreciate your support during this difficult time.

Sincerely,

Jill Mortimer, Ed.D.

Date : 3/15/2023 1:06:55 PM
From : "Jill Mortimer"
To : "Kristen Sawyer"
Cc : "Courtney Carmichael"
Subject : Re: Follow Up Email from Dr. Mortimer

Hello Mrs. Sawyer,

I am copying Dr. Carmichael. She will get back to you. Take care.

On Tue, Mar 14, 2023 at 2:34 PM Kristen Sawyer <designsbykm@gmail.com> wrote:
Hello Dr. Mortimer,

I had reached out to you after the email that went out during Yom Kippur. At that time you referred me to Dr. Carmichael. I had spoke with her and she assured me that the district was taking this very seriously, and there would be programming/additional resources provided to students and teachers. Would you be able to share with me what programs/workshops/resources were implemented?

Thank you,
Kristen Sawyer
646.522.0769

On Tue, Mar 14, 2023 at 2:08 PM Westwood Regional School District
<donotreply@wwrsd.org> wrote:



March 14, 2023

Dear Westwood Regional School District Staff and Parents:

I sincerely hope you and your family members are well. I am writing today to provide an update on the swastika that was found on the grounds of Brookside School on Monday morning. We have both short-term and long-term goals for addressing this incident.

Status of the Investigation

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- The police investigation has concluded. I cannot speak to what they determined or whether the Bergen County Prosecutor's Office is involved. I do not have authorization to speak on their behalf, and it would be inappropriate for me to do so.
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- Had the swastika created a substantial disruption *in the school*, I would refer to [Regulation 5600](#). The infraction would be "Bias Language," which comes with a first offense penalty of a one-day out-of-school suspension, referral to school counseling, and a possible HIB finding. I will put this topic on the agenda for the next Policy Committee meeting because the Board should expand the language to say Bias Language or Symbol. The Administration and committee members will review the discipline called for to determine whether they feel what is written is appropriate.

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- ***Please know the District has conducted 36 programs on preventing harassment, intimidation and bullying this school year alone. It is a regular***

part of our programming, and we are committed to maintaining a welcoming environment for all of our students. We have no tolerance for hate.

- We just implemented the Responsive Classroom program in the elementary schools this school year, and we intend to expand it to the middle grades next year. The Morning Meeting Responsive Classroom practices consists of everyone in the classroom gathering in a circle at the beginning of each school day and proceeding through four sequential components: greeting, sharing, group activity, and morning message. At the middle school level, morning meetings are replaced by advisory lessons which share the same core beliefs as morning meetings, but with a developmentally appropriate approach. In fact, advisory lessons are already taking place at the middle school. Core beliefs associated with the program include cooperation, assertiveness, responsibility, empathy and self-control.

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In closing, please continue to have faith in the District’s leadership. We have followed the appropriate steps in the Department of Education’s guide for responding to hate incidents and bias-related acts. Furthermore, I have consulted with the District’s attorney on more

than one occasion to keep him abreast of the developments. Your trust in us is invaluable, and we appreciate your support during this difficult time.

Sincerely,

Jill Mortimer, Ed.D.

--

*Jill Mortimer, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools
Westwood Regional School District
701 Ridgewood Road
Township of Washington, New Jersey 07676
201-664-0880 x2001*

Date : 3/23/2023 3:02:56 PM

From : "Jill Mortimer"

To : "Rena Barone"

Subject : Re: Follow Up Email from Dr. Mortimer

Don't send this. She is referring to the Planker incident from October. I'll draft something for you to send back to her tomorrow.

Sent from my iPhone

On Mar 23, 2023, at 2:45 PM, Rena Barone <rena.barone@wwrsd.org> wrote:

This was the follow-up communication...



Rená Barone

Administrative Assistant - Superintendent's Office

Westwood Regional Board of Education

701 Ridgewood Road, Township of Washington, New Jersey 07676

tel: [201-664-0880](tel:201-664-0880), x2001 / fax: [201-664-7642](tel:201-664-7642)

rena.barone@wwrsd.org

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Westwood Regional School District** <donotreply@wwrsd.org>

Date: Tue, Mar 14, 2023 at 2:08 PM

Subject: Follow Up Email from Dr. Mortimer

To: <rena.barone@wwrsd.org>



March 14, 2023

Dear Westwood Regional School District Staff and Parents:

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opportunity to be better, kinder, more accepting and compassionate, and more empathetic towards each other. If you are struggling in any way, please do not hesitate to reach out to your counselor or myself. I take great pride in having an open door policy for all of our students. I leave you with this quote from Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. "I have decided to stick with love. Hate is too great a burden to bear."

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Sincerely,

Jill Mortimer, Ed.D.

Date : 3/14/2023 2:53:48 PM

From : "Courtney Carmichael"

To : "Sabrina Krawczyk"

Cc : "kelly.hughes@wwrsd.org" , "Kristin Gomez" , "Jill Mortimer"

Subject : Re: FW: Important Email from Dr. Mortimer

Thank you for reaching out. I hope Dr. Mortimer's latest update answered your questions and provided greater clarity to this distressing incident.

Regards,

Courtney Carmichael

Dr. Courtney Carmichael, she/her/hers

Director of Elementary Education

Westwood Regional School District

701 Ridgewood Road

Township of Washington, NJ 07676

"Diversity is about all of us, and about us having to figure out how to walk through this world together." ~Jacqueline Woodson

On Mon, Mar 13, 2023 at 10:23 PM Sabrina Krawczyk <sabrinadeutsch@hotmail.com> wrote:

Hi all,

I know I am not alone as a parent totally distraught over the message I received today from Dr. Mortimer. I have so many things to say but they won't come out right.

It would be my hope:

- ☐ That this will be addressed, age appropriate, with the entire student population of Brookside- shying away from issues does not make them go away
- ☐ That resources (pamphlets, newsletters, YouTube videos, etc.) on how parents can address anti-Semitism and hate in age appropriate ways in their home will be sent out tomorrow; give parents tools to help
- ☐ That my children will not be in the position for the foreseeable future as being the "Jewish" experts given that they are the only Jewish kids in their grade (that we know about) at Brookside
- ☐ That additional counseling will be brought in and offered to the entire district because I hear this is not an isolated incident and incidents like this bring up generational trauma and kids are afraid of facing additional anti-Semitism if they speak out

- That all students are told if you see something, say something and are given the process of what happens from the school if hate is expressed towards Jewish students
- That consequences are shared with the entire community much like the bullying ones were shared earlier in the year
- That this is put on the BoE agenda so the community can address their feelings early in the meeting on March 20th
- That again, you reconsider hosting the 5th grade dance at a church. This is an example of a micro-aggression that is an easy fix to show the district considers the perception of feelings of all their families.

I look forward to your responses.

Warmly,

Sabrina

From: [Westwood Regional School District](#)
Sent: Monday, March 13, 2023 4:30 PM
To: sabrinadeutsch@hotmail.com
Subject: Important Email from Dr. Mortimer



March 13, 2023

Dear WWRSD Parents:

This morning, a Brookside School parent reported finding a Swastika, **which is a symbol of hate**, on the grounds of the school. It was created with twigs, and it was about one foot long by one foot wide. We immediately reported it to the Westwood Police Department. The District Administration and Westwood Police Department worked in concert to quickly identify the individuals involved, as there was video

evidence. At the writing of this email, the police investigation remains ongoing. The Principals of our other schools checked their grounds, and we did not locate additional Swastikas. Moreover, we contacted the Jewish Foundation of Northern New Jersey. They are activating their teams to provide resources and assistance to us.

This act is a hate crime; it is not freedom of speech. We have removed the Swastika to prevent exposure to this message of intolerance.

As I have said in the past, the Westwood Regional School District condemns all acts of hate, violence and intolerance. These expressions are detrimental to the well-being of all people, in all environments, and especially for children and educators in our schools. When acts such as these take place in our schools, we need to make sure people realize this does not reflect our views and beliefs, is not accepted, and will be investigated.

Your continued support in spreading a message of kindness and respect for all remains paramount in our partnership. We cannot let messages of hate darken our wonderful community.

In the meantime, please reach out to the Director of Elementary Education, Dr. Courtney Carmichael (courtney.carmichael@wwrsd.org), if you would like to share your opinions or suggestions related to this situation. However, please keep in mind she cannot share additional information with you since there is a police investigation. We will provide more information when it becomes available.

Sincerely,

Jill Mortimer, Ed.D.

Date : 3/13/2023 8:28:40 PM

From : "Jill Mortimer"

To : "Elyse Scileppi"

BCc : kelly.hughes@wwrsd.org,

courtney.carmichael@wwrsd.org

Subject : Re: Hate incidents

Hello Elyse,

Thank you for your email and for expressing your concerns. Please know they are important to me, and I am absolutely heartbroken by today's event.

At this time, I have provided all of the information I am able to share. I will provide an explanation of why in my next parent email. I cannot do anything to potentially interfere with a police investigation or to violate student privacy. I'm sure you would not want me to potentially compromise that.

We anticipate speaking to the Jewish Federation tomorrow. We did not hear back from them today. I will have information regarding our programming response soon.

I ask that you please have faith in us, and trust us to handle this. We are aggressively working to address it.

Thank you.

Sent from my iPhone

On Mar 13, 2023, at 7:06 PM, Elyse Scileppi <elysescileppi@gmail.com> wrote:

Dear Dr. Mortimer,

As a parent of children in the district, I am concerned with recent events including the Swastika discovered at Brookside School. How is the district addressing this incident? Also, what programs are being put in place to educate students on the importance of inclusivity (race, religion, gender, etc)?

Thank you,
Elyse Scileppi

Sent from my iPhone

Date : 3/13/2023 11:02:42 AM
From : "Jason Garcia"
To : "Jill Mortimer"
Subject : Re: IMG_8036-preview.pvt

Thank you.

Where was that and is it spray paint?

Jay Garcia
(646) 206-1049

On Mar 13, 2023, at 10:47 AM, Jill Mortimer <jill.@[redacted]> wrote:

Good Morning,

This morning, a parent reported seeing a swastika on Brookside School property. The Administrator photographed it and then scratched it out so that students would not see it. We reported it to the Westwood Police Department, and we are checking our cameras. It may or may not have been one of our students, so we should not jump to conclusions.

I am preparing a parent/staff letter, and we will contact the Jewish Foundation of Northern NJ.

The picture is attached. You will hear more from me later once we have a better handle on the situation. Everything is very fluid right now.

Sent from my iPhone

--

Jill Mortimer, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools
Westwood Regional School District
701 Ridgewood Road
Township of Washington, New Jersey 07676
201-664-0880 x2001

<IMG_8036.heic>

Date : 3/14/2023 3:38:50 PM

From : "Sabrina Krawczyk"

To : "Courtney Carmichael"

Cc : "kelly.hughes@wwrsd.org" , "Kristin Gomez" , "Jill Mortimer"

Subject : Re: Important Email from Dr. Mortimer

Hi there,

Unfortunately only 1 bullet was mentioned in todays follow-up so I would appreciate the remainder be addressed now.

Warmly,

Sabrina Krawczyk

Sent from my iPhone

On Mar 14, 2023, at 2:53 PM, Courtney Carmichael
<courtney.carmichael@wwrsd.org> wrote:

Thank you for reaching out. I hope Dr. Mortimer's latest update answered your questions and provided greater clarity to this distressing incident.

Regards,

Courtney Carmichael

Dr. Courtney Carmichael, she/her/hers

Director of Elementary Education

Westwood Regional School District

701 Ridgewood Road

Township of Washington, NJ 07676

"Diversity is about all of us, and about us having to figure out how to walk through this world together." ~Jacqueline Woodson

On Mon, Mar 13, 2023 at 10:23 PM Sabrina Krawczyk
<sabrinadeutsch@hotmail.com> wrote:

Hi all,

I know I am not alone as a parent totally distraught over the message I received today from Dr. Mortimer. I have so many things to say but they won't come out right.

It would be my hope:

- ☐ That this will be addressed, age appropriate, with the entire student population of Brookside- shying away from issues does not make them go away
- ☐ That resources (pamphlets, newsletters, YouTube videos, etc.) on how parents can address anti-Semitism and hate in age appropriate ways in their home will be sent out tomorrow; give parents tools to help
- ☐ That my children will not be in the position for the foreseeable future as being the “Jewish” experts given that they are the only Jewish kids in their grade (that we know about) at Brookside
- ☐ That additional counseling will be brought in and offered to the entire district because I hear this is not an isolated incident and incidents like this bring up generational trauma and kids are afraid of facing additional anti-Semitism if they speak out
- ☐ That all students are told if you see something, say something and are given the process of what happens from the school if hate is expressed towards Jewish students
- ☐ That consequences are shared with the entire community much like the bullying ones were shared earlier in the year
- ☐ That this is put on the BoE agenda so the community can address their feelings early in the meeting on March 20th
- ☐ That again, you reconsider hosting the 5th grade dance at a church. This is an example of a micro-aggression that is an easy fix to show the district considers the perception of feelings of all their families.

I look forward to your responses.

Warmly,

Sabrina

From: [Westwood Regional School District](#)
Sent: Monday, March 13, 2023 4:30 PM
To: sabrinadeutsch@hotmail.com
Subject: Important Email from Dr. Mortimer



March 13, 2023

Dear WWRSD Parents:

This morning, a Brookside School parent reported finding a Swastika, **which is a symbol of hate**, on the grounds of the school. It was created with twigs, and it was about one foot long by one foot wide. We immediately reported it to the Westwood Police Department. The District Administration and Westwood Police Department worked in concert to quickly identify the individuals involved, as there was video evidence. At the writing of this email, the police investigation remains ongoing. The Principals of our other schools checked their grounds, and we did not locate additional Swastikas. Moreover, we contacted the Jewish Foundation of Northern New Jersey. They are activating their teams to provide resources and assistance to us.

This act is a hate crime; it is not freedom of speech. We have removed the Swastika to prevent exposure to this message of intolerance.

As I have said in the past, the Westwood Regional School District condemns all acts of hate, violence and intolerance. These expressions are detrimental to the well-being of all people, in all environments, and especially for children and educators in our schools. When acts such as these take place in our schools, we need to make sure people realize this does not reflect our views and beliefs, is not accepted, and will be investigated.

Your continued support in spreading a message of kindness and respect for all remains paramount in our partnership. We cannot let messages of hate darken our wonderful community.

In the meantime, please reach out to the Director of Elementary Education, Dr. Courtney Carmichael (courtney.carmichael@wwrsd.org), if you would like to share your opinions or suggestions related to this situation. However, please keep in mind she cannot share additional information with you since there is a police investigation.

We will provide more information when it becomes available.

Sincerely,

Jill Mortimer, Ed.D.

Date : 3/13/2023 9:42:16 AM
From : "Nicole Ferlise"
To : "Jill Mortimer"
Subject : Re: Swastika found on Brookside Property

Thanks, Jill.

So sorry to hear this.

Frank and I just did a sweep and found nothing. We're going to keep our eyes peeled regardless.

Thanks,

On Mon, Mar 13, 2023 at 8:53 AM Jill Mortimer <jill.mortimer@wwrsd.org> wrote:

Good Morning,

Kristen Gomez just called to alert me to the fact that a parent noticed a swastika on Brookside School property. Please take a look at your grounds to see if you have one too. Naturally, lmk if you find something.

We are looking at the cameras, and the police are on the way over to investigate. I am starting a parent/staff letter now.

On a side note, K-5, I am speaking to the attorney after lunch regarding our Health Curriculum issue. I will let you know what I find out.

Take care.

--

Jill Mortimer, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools
Westwood Regional School District
701 Ridgewood Road
Township of Washington, New Jersey 07676
201-664-0880 x2001

Date : 3/22/2023 3:59:12 PM

From : "Rena Barone"

To : noda@northjersey.com

BCc : jill.mortimer@wwrsd.org

Subject : Re: Website Message: You have a message from Stephanie Noda

Attachment : WWRSD Staff-Parents Letter 031323.pdf;

Good afternoon Ms. Noda,

As requested, is the correspondence sent to Staff/Parents on March 13 from Dr. Mortimer. Thank you.



Rená Barone

Administrative Assistant - Superintendent's Office

Westwood Regional Board of Education

701 Ridgewood Road, Township of Washington, New Jersey 07676

tel: [201-664-0880](tel:201-664-0880), x2001 / fax: [201-664-7642](tel:201-664-7642)

rena.barone@wwrsd.org

On Wed, Mar 22, 2023 at 1:10 PM Thrillshare <no-reply@apptegy.com> wrote:

Sender: Stephanie Noda

Sender IP Address: 173.63.119.140

To reply to this message, use reply email noda@northjersey.com

Good afternoon,

My name is Stephanie Noda, a reporter from The Record newspaper. I'm reaching out because I was hoping to get a copy of a community letter that was sent out on Monday regarding the finding of swastikas at a school in the district. If you could send the letter, or any other statement from Superintendent Mortimer about the situation, to noda@northjersey.com, I'd appreciate it. Thank you.

This message was sent from the messaging service on your website via Thrillshare on 03/22/23 12:10 PM CDT

Date : 3/13/2023 8:53:14 AM

From : "Jill Mortimer"

To : "Frank Connelly" , "Melissa Paliano" , "Christina Scaduto" , "Michael Fiorello" , "Nicole Ferlise" , "Bronwen Calderon" , "Courtney Carmichael"

Subject : Swastika found on Brookside Property

Good Morning,

Kristen Gomez just called to alert me to the fact that a parent noticed a swastika on Brookside School property. Please take a look at your grounds to see if you have one too. Naturally, lmk if you find something.

We are looking at the cameras, and the police are on the way over to investigate. I am starting a parent/staff letter now.

On a side note, K-5, I am speaking to the attorney after lunch regarding our Health Curriculum issue. I will let you know what I find out.

Take care.

--

*Jill Mortimer, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools
Westwood Regional School District
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