



Members of the community attend the Thursday, Oct. 7, Board of Education (BOE) meeting at Lafayette to communicate their positions on the mask mandate, vaccinations and the harassment of staff in RSD. Jessica Risenhoover, parent, speaks during patron comments about the current harassment of teachers, administrators and BOE members by RSD parents and community members. "This is not who we should be as a society and as a community," Risenhoover said. "As an adult, and as a parent of Marquette children, there's zero chance I'm going to allow that to happen in my community." In the past two years, there has been an increase in community and parent involvement at BOE meetings leading to much controversy between opposing viewpoints. *Photographs by Ben Hughes*



RSD encourages civil discourse at board meetings

aarushi BUTE

When Stevion Griffin, sophomore, was confronted by two white women while walking toward the bus after football practice, he never expected what he believed was going to be a sports interview to instead be a one-sided confrontation.

Griffin said the women told him to take off his mask because slaves used to wear masks as a punishment.

As a Black man, Griffin said he felt targeted.

"I felt targeted because I was doing the right thing to wear a mask around the school," Griffin said. "I was following the rules but I was still targeted."

Griffin said a police report was filed and he was called down to the office, but it hasn't been addressed since.

The two women were on campus to attend the Thursday, Sept. 2, Board of Education (BOE) meeting.

Griffin's experience is not an isolated incident at RSD board meetings this year.

PARENT EXPERIENCE

Jessica Risenhoover, parent, is another community member who has repeatedly been called derogatory names when attending BOE meetings.

"I'm not the only parent who has been subjected to this stuff," Risenhoover said. "It's why parents aren't coming to the meetings. They are terrified. We are being harassed coming into the meetings and during them."

But Risenhoover said she will continue to speak at BOE meetings regardless of other opinions.

"I don't care how much fire that causes me to get," Risenhoover said. "[The BOE] need to hear voices that are supportive of them and that show a different side to our community."

Risenhoover said the lack of consequences for this behavior over the last 18 months is what eventually led to more extreme incidents like the one Griffin experienced at MHS.

But Risenhoover said she is hopeful due to a statement Attorney General Merrick Garland released Saturday, Oct. 2, regarding increased strategies to address harassment against school board members, teachers and workers across the country.

"My hope is that we'll learn something from now into the future so that we're back to that civil discourse"

- Dr. Tim Ricker
Interim Superintendant

RSD REACTION

Interim Superintendent Dr. Tim Ricker said the BOE has the same policies from pre-COVID regarding the parent code of conduct. But due to the escalation of controversial speech at BOE meetings, the administration, who is in charge of acting on the consequences, has had to reinforce the policies more quickly and seriously, he said.

Dr. Ricker said the escalation has stopped community members from coming to meetings due to fear of getting targeted or videotaped.

"People are entitled to First Amendment rights, they're entitled to their opinions, they're entitled to agree or disagree with anything that takes place," Dr. Ricker said. "It's the fashion in which the

people disagree that makes it either inappropriate or appropriate. It's not the content, it's the action."

One of the policies allows RSD admin to restrict community members from coming into facilities if they threaten the safety of students and employees, Dr. Ricker said.

To decide on the consequences, Dr. Ricker said he looks at how the incident affects the district, the school, the students and employees.

In serious situations where employees or students don't feel safe after enforcement, higher authorities like the FBI will get involved and a safety plan will be designed, Dr. Ricker said.

"My hope is that we'll learn something from now into the future so that we're back to that civil discourse," Dr. Ricker said. "We can agree to disagree and make people feel comfortable about their positions on whatever it is."

Steven Aspinall, school resource officer, said the inappropriate behavior has divided the community but it would also be hard to prevent further incidents.

"I don't know if you can prevent further incidents," Officer Aspinall said. "It's freedom of speech so you can't hinder that. If you say yes to someone but no to someone else, that's picking sides, and we can't do that."