

Article rank | 10 Apr 2011 | Traverse City Record-Eagle (Traverse City, MI)
 BY LINDSAY VANHULLE lvanhulle@record-eagle.com

TC man: Recall 2 school officials 4

Resident says board members are promoting homosexuality

TRAVERSE CITY — A local resident who has publicly campaigned against homosexuality wants to recall some Traverse City school-board members because he contends they promote gay issues in schools.

In an email sent Friday to the RecordEagle and others, Paul Nepote wrote that board Vice President Gary Appel and Treasurer Kelly Hall "show their lack of compassion for students, and their commitment to promoting homosexuality in the Traverse City School System" and "should be recalled ASAP."

Appel and Hall are on a school-board policy committee that has considered amending the district's antibullying policy to include sexual orientation as a specific protection against harassment.

Nepote opposes that policy and opposed a citywide anti-discrimination ordinance that bans the practice on the basis of sexual orientation. He wants city voters to decide its fate in a fall election.

He also said he reviewed internal emails the district released to Bill Wiesner, founder of religious-based website TCFamily.org, under a state Freedom of Information Act request.

Wiesner said he doesn't understand the reason for protecting sexual orientation if a policy is meant to cover all students.

"Why are you pushing this?" he said. "I'm afraid that if any student were to question anyone else's sexual orientation, that that student would be charged with bullying."

The FOIA inquiry intended to determine a relationship between Traverse City Area Public Schools and a Central High School GayStraight Alliance, community organizations and individuals cited by name.

"I don't know what kind of support there is for a recall," Appel said, adding that he has received encouragement for a stronger antibullying policy. "I would think it's quite small."

Nepote's Friday message included excerpts pulled from Appel's and Hall's email exchanges, including Appel's attempt at a joke at Nepote's expense.

"If he comes to Monday's meeting, we'll just have the ski teams beat him up," Appel wrote.

But Nepote omitted a parenthetical addition at the end of Appel's email, sent March 12 to Hall and board President Marjie Rich, which states "(just kidding in case you are reading this as a result of FOIA)."

Central's downhill and cross-country ski teams were recognized at the start of the March 14 schoolboard meeting.

"It was clearly a misstep on my part," Appel said. "Amidst the seriousness of the work that we do, we try to inject humor and it sometimes falls flat."

Nepote quoted Hall's use of the word "bigots" in an apparent reference to himself and Wiesner, but it was unclear when it was sent or in what context.

Hall said her use of the word wasn't the best choice, but added that part of her role as an elected board member is "to face and refute where necessary opinions that I disagree with."

Nepote said their messages are evidence of broader political motivation aimed at highlighting sexual orientation to students and contradicts their work to combat bullying.

"What an example they set for the kids," Nepote said. "It's so obvious that this whole thing is an agenda item."

Wiesner filed two records requests with TCAPS administrators since March 24, partly in response to the school board's review of its anti-bullying policy.

Nepote hinted at the impetus for the request in a Facebook exchange last week with John Scudato, a former TCAPS teacher and union president.

"If we can identify TCAPS Staffers who are complicit in the efforts to promote homosexuality in our public schools by sharing students personal information with known 'Gay Activists' we will contact every parent of every child who came in contact with those homosexual activists," Nepote wrote.

Appel asked that a policy committee look at whether guidelines for bullying enforcement need to be strengthened. That group will meet later this month. The rules could be adopted as soon as April 25.

Oponents to adding sexual orientation to the list of protected groups have said it would mean TCAPS is endorsing homosexuality and that the policy shouldn't single out some students.

Nepote said his issue is with the addition of sexual orientation and not with other groups, such as race, sex and religion.

"It's OK because they've always been there. They're not something that isn't obvious. They're obvious protected classes," he said. "I only mean sexual orientation because it's being put there because of an agenda."

No evidence of bullying incidents against gays or lesbians appeared in documents he reviewed,

Nepote said.

Hall and Appel denied the bullying policy is the result of politics. Both participated in committee discussions prior to its release to the full board.

"That accusation is stunning, and it's mindless ignorance," Appel said. "It's laughable."

He and Hall said neither will be pressured into removing their support for a strengthened policy.



"I'm doing it to try to make our schools safe places for learning for all people," Hall said. "And if I'm recalled because of that effort, I will go to bed that night knowing that I did what in my conscience is the right thing for our community."

Printed and distributed by NewspaperDirect | www.newspaperdirect.com, US/Can: 1.877.980.4040, Intern: 800.6364.6364 | Copyright and protected by applicable law.