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TCAPS board must stand up to real bullies 1

Traverse City Area Public Schools' officials are prepared to add muscle to the district's anti-bullying rules, in part by specifying students' sexual orientation as a component of an overall policy to prevent and, if need be, prosecute harassment.

A school board committee recommended enhanced student protections and TCAPS board members likely will vote on the measure on April 25.

It's wise, well-reasoned legislation that deserves to be adopted, despite shout-it-down efforts by a handful of fringe-element locals.

The TCAPS board should approve the policy for two primary reasons: First, it's good business to expand the district's policy against bullying to include protections for students' sexual orientation, height, weight, marital status and genetic information.

It's a litigious world, and TCAPS' proposal attempts to achieve protections for student and district similar to those adopted by any number of public and private institutions.

TCAPS' board has a duty to limit taxpayers' liability if it identifies potential pitfalls, and a failure to protect individuals and groups who've earned such legal protections — thanks largely to bigoted and ignorant attacks against them — represents an unnecessary risk. In this case, smart policy equates smart business.

Far more importantly, the enhanced anti-bullying policy is an effort to protect young people — oft-fragile, oft-emotional — from either levying or being subjected to undue harassment. And it's necessary precisely because it happens all too frequently. Those who claim gay or sexually conflicted students aren't targeted for harassment and bullying are disingenuous, clueless, or blinded by personal biases.

School-age kids have the capacity to launch themselves wolfpacklike on peers they may perceive as weak or different. Such encounters can result in physical or emotional trauma, or worse, and it makes all the sense in the world to set behavior parameters that all students and staff can understand.

A tiny but venomous fringe group led by local residents Bill Wiesner and Paul Nepote oppose the policy, and contend it reflects a district effort to push a radical homosexual agenda on unsuspecting students and their parents.

Wiesner and Nepote launched what's in effect a Joseph McCarthy-esque campaign to smear the district, certain teachers, advisers and other locals who don't fit their rather narrow world view. They claim to promote Christian principles, though not the loving, forgiving Christianity most in this community choose to embrace. No, theirs is a hateful, bigoted approach to religion and fellow man that speaks far more about them than of their intended targets.

Wiesner and Nepote are true bullies. TCAPS' board needs to stand up to them, approve the enhanced policy, and send a message that bullying won't work here.

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