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# TCAPS' bullying policy subject of FOIA request

## TCAPS' bullying policy subject of records request

TRAVERSE CITY — The founder of a local religious-based website filed a lengthy public records request with Traverse City Area Public Schools for documents related to a recent school board review of a bullying policy.

In addition, Bill Wiesner, who maintains TCFamily.org, seeks information about the district's "funding, sponsorship, promotion, discussion, correspondence, and/or relationship with any other organization(s) or activities or events regarding the so-called 'gay-lesbian-bisexual-transgender' issue."

Several groups and individuals, including the Gay-Straight Alliance at Central High School and the Traverse City Human Rights Commission, are mentioned by name.

Wiesner, who filed his state Freedom of Information Act request March 24, could not be reached for comment Monday.

TCFamily.org describes itself as "defending families," and includes links to religious articles that discourage homosexuality.

District administrators said they don't ask about the intention behind a FOIA records request, which requires governments to make available files, emails and other documents upon request.

They have five days to respond to the original inquiry and can take up to 10 additional business days to produce the information.

Christine Davis, TCAPS' executive director of human resources, notified Wiesner in writing that the district would use its 10-day extension. The deadline to respond is April 7.

Wiesner's request is so broad that "it's hard for me to narrow down exactly what is being requested," Superintendent Steve Cousins said. "We want to do our due diligence to make sure that we meet the FOIA request as best we can, so that means that we'll have to do a broad sweep to make sure that we're hitting everything."

The request stems in part from recent school board discussion of upgrades to the district's bullying policy. If amended, the policy would include specific protection on the basis of sexual orientation, height, weight, marital status and genetic information.

The federal Office of Civil Rights has supported school districts including such language, something Cousins cited as a reason for TCAPS' proposed changes.

"I obviously support the policy, or I wouldn't put it before the board," he said. "From a perspective of raising people's awareness and holding people accountable, I think it's a good move, too."

The debate also sparked numerous public comments from both sides of the issue at a recent school board meeting and a letter in opposition from American Family Association of Michigan President Gary Glenn.

Traverse City resident Paul Nepote, who spoke against the changes, said language identifying certain classes of students is unnecessary under a policy designed to cover everyone.

"This is definitely just an agenda thing. It's not to protect the kids," he said. "They need to treat them like all kids."

Wiesner made specific references to Northwestern Michigan College spokesman Paul Heaton, and student groups Spectrum and Pride.

Pride replaced Spectrum this semester as a group at NMC that focuses on event planning and leadership training for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender students, said John Parker, NMC's interim director of student life.

Student groups typically focus their efforts on campus, Parker said, adding that he doesn't know of any students taking fliers to high schools.

The records request isn't surprising, said M'Lynn Hartwell, a former city Human Rights Commission member who works with local group Traverse City Equality, and was mentioned by name in Wiesner's letter.



“I would say this is a pretty good example of what happens when students get the impression that bullying is OK,” Hartwell said. “It’s so broad, so (non)specific, that it would appear I think even to the casual observer to just be bullying the school system.”

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