

Transgender policy enforced

Law allows Dallas High School student to use boys locker room with others

By Jolene Guzman
The Itemizer-Observer

DALLAS — On Nov. 16, the Dallas School District sent a letter to parents of students in physical education classes with a transgender student who is being allowed to use the locker room of the gender he identifies as.

The letter outlined the district's policy, which in accordance with federal law, prohibits "discrimination on the basis of sex or gender pursuant to 'Title IX' federal laws."

"The legal guidance regarding the enforcement of 'Title IX' is very clear that transgender students have the right to 'same sex' facilities such as bathrooms or

locker rooms based on the gender they identify with, not based on their biological gender," the letter read.

The rights of transgender students are included in the district's nondiscrimination policy, which also prohibits discrimination or harassment against staff or students based on race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, and national or ethnic origin, to name a few.

Transgender is included in "sexual orientation" for the purposes of the policy, which states: "sexual orientation means an individual's actual or perceived heterosexuality, homosexuality, bisexuality, or gender identity regardless of whether the individual's gender identity, appearance, expression or

behavior differs from that which is traditionally associated with the individual's sex at birth."

Superintendent Michelle Johnstone said the district's enforcement of the policy was determined only after consulting with the district's lawyer, representatives from Oregon Department of Education and Oregon School Boards Association, Dallas School Principal Steve Spencer, and Athletic Director Tim Larson, the district's Title IX director.

"It's not an overnight thing," Johnstone said.

Also, high school officials met with students who would be affected by the policy to explain what it meant. Johnstone said very few expressed concerns or

asked questions in those meetings. Students were asked to take the letter home and discuss it with their parents. Assistant Superintendent Dennis Engle said the district has received calls from six parents who had concerns, but most understood that the district was following the law.

Engle added because of the federal laws involved, this is not a decision that could be made by the Dallas School Board.

The timing of the letter coincided with controversy over statements made by a Dallas city councillor regarding transgender students, but that had no bearing on district policy or its practical applications, Johnstone said.

Students take on tough topic in play

Central's production class prepares show about school mass shootings

By Emily Mentzer
The Itemizer-Observer

INDEPENDENCE — The play isn't until January, but already Central High School's production class is causing some waves.

"People don't like being uncomfortable, especially the majority of people in this small town," said Reba Hoffman. "Already, the idea that this show is happening is making people uncomfortable."

The class will perform, "Bang, Bang, You're Dead," a play by William Mastromonte loosely based on the Thurston High School shooting.

"This is a creative way to bring this to the community and students that's more acceptable," Hoffman said. "These scary things can happen."

The play was cast during spring term, said Jeff Witt, teacher of the production class, well before the mass casualty shooting in Roseburg.

Those events gave students a firmer resolve that, complaints or not, the show must go on.

They realized that a mass shooting could happen anywhere.

Witt said he wanted to do a play that was darker and edgier than shows he had done in the past. "Bang, Bang" has a personal connection to him, as a college friend of his had parents who worked at Thurston high when the shooting happened.

"It's not a sit-back, hum-along kind of show," Witt said. "It's good for people to be challenged. No one thought it would happen in Roseburg or Sandy Hook."

The play explores what happens to normal kids to take them to a dark place, driven to commit an act such as killing their classmates, Witt said.

"There's not a lot of solutions in the show," he said. "A lot is left up to the audience."

The point is not to glorify violence, said Rynn Hastings.

"We forget that empathy is such a huge thing," she said, adding that when a threat at Central spread across social media in October, people were joking about the person accused of starting it, laughing and making fun, which just

made matters worse. Although the threat was later found not to be credible, but still had students and their parents on guard and worried or afraid.

"That's when I thought about this show," Hastings said. "You learn what a person has to go through. I've never been more excited to do a show until now. I hope we raise awareness."

Other students echoed Hastings' excitement.

Jacob Eschette said the play is not about a specific thing, but more about the big picture of society, especially high-school mentality.

"High schoolers have in their mind these social constructs," he said. "In reality, we're all people trying to fit in. Josh (the shooter in the play) is very much portrayed as a disturbed person. He's reached a point in his mind where everyone is against him. You become dark — there are no justifications — but there are things we can do as a society to help stop people from getting to that place."

The play shows how bullying can stack up and take its toll on someone. Students hope the play will get people talking about it and talking about how to change it.

Superintendent Buzz Brazeau said the play will help the discussion of serious topics.

"The idea is to bring the idea of bullying and all the things we're concerned with about kids to light and get them to understand, in the video game, you can push reset, and in real life, you can't," Brazeau said. "I'm really proud of the kids. We had to look at that with some sleepless nights. When I see the kids excited to get the message out to help themselves, I salute them for taking on a tough topic."

He said the topic was made tougher by the shooting in Roseburg and the threat at Central, "but in some ways, more important."

That responsibility to tackle the issues is at the top of the minds of the young actors.

They hope to raise awareness of not just shootings, but increasing empathy for others and decreasing bullying.

Developers share ideas for Valley Concrete

City of Independence gets three request for qualifications with visions for site

By Emily Mentzer
The Itemizer-Observer

INDEPENDENCE — Three developers have submitted requests for qualifications, vying for the chance to work on and purchase the old Valley Concrete site in Independence.

"All three were very good, well-qualified proposals," said Shawn Irvine, economic development director for Independence.

No purchase price or numbers have been discussed. The RFQ process allows developers to outline a vision for property without getting down to the nitty gritty details, Irvine said.

"They all, for the most part, have the conceptual ideas of what we've been talking about," Irvine said. "Two had specific visions that included building a hotel; one left space for a hotel, but nothing too specific on that."

When city leaders purchased the 20-acre parcel in 2014, the hope was to find a developer who would build something to contribute to the downtown atmosphere of Independence.

The property was purchased for \$800,000. The city has spent more than half a million dollars on grading, inspections and other improvements in hopes of making it more appealing to a developer.

In addition to possible



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Well before asking developers what they would do with the old Valley Concrete site on the Willamette River, city officials hired a firm to design a concept plan for the area.

lodging, Irvine said developers included small commercial shops, restaurants and residential housing options in their proposals.

"This is the vision-conceptual level, so they didn't get real specific about size, scope, design," Irvine said. "As the market develops, they'll get a better idea."

Irvine said the city hopes to have selected a developer to work with by Dec. 25.

At that point, a memo-

randum of understanding would be drawn up before negotiations begin — and those may take a while.

"They're going to be figuring out what pencils out for them, and we're going to have to look real hard at what pencils out for us, because we're going to need a return on investment for what we've put into it," Irvine said.

While city leaders are will-

ing to offer incentives, the prices have to be right, he noted. It also may depend on the developer's building schedule, which could be years.

"If they're going to build all at once, and we're going to get all the fees and taxes right away, maybe that does work," Irvine said.

If the city cannot come to terms with the first choice, it can turn to the next developer, Irvine said.



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