

# Daniel Boone parents raise racism concerns

By Denise Larive  
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BIRDSBORO -- Gary L. Otto, superintendent of the Daniel Boone School District, assured parents and community members last night that the district's schools are safe and secure following the Feb. 29 incident of racial slurs written on the mirror in a boys' bathroom at the high school.



"We have implemented a series of safety measures to minimize threats -- of daily searches, clear backpacks, the closing of several lavatories, the banning of carrying bookbags during the school day, and metal detectors arrived today," said Otto, adding, "But this is only the start of handling this."

He said mesh and transparent bags speed up the morning searches and that no more than four minutes of instruction time have been lost due to the searches.

"We will not allow convenience to trump security," said Otto. "We may possibly implement permanent metal detectors."

The state police are working with the district's administration to set up meetings with parents and state police who are investigating the incident in the bathrooms as well as threats posted on Facebook.

A public meeting is scheduled for March 28 with the state police, district administration, parents, and community members with updated information and the issue of how to move forward.

"Police will give the school district some initiatives to starting a process," said Otto.

"I'm most proud of the kids, of getting back to the business of education," said Dane Miller, assistant high school principal. "The mood is upbeat and the kids are back to laughing with their friends and I'm proud of the way they have handled a very difficult situation."

While parents seemed satisfied with the security update, other parents said the district needs to address the greater, underlying issue of racism.

"I support the security measures that are put into place," said Jennifer Ann Roebel, Douglassville. "What about integrating tolerance into the school to keep it from happening again? And how much of the staff has gone through catastrophe training and not just for tornadoes?"

Otto said students were shown YouTube video interviews from the Columbine incident, teachers are trained annually and there are several drills throughout each school year.

"Most situations are bullying and harassment of one on one student," said Miller. "We will need to add some programs and training because this is a completely new situation."

Douglassville resident Stephanie Wiggins said the real issue is racism, which needs to be addressed and owned, and until then nothing is going to change.

"Racism is very much alive in this area and surrounding area," said Wiggins. "There have been several racial issues. Our children were home-schooled, but the first week they started in the public school they were asked if they were black, or white. They are a mixed race, but it was like kids needed to know what they were before they would be accepted."

Monica Lacey, Douglassville, agreed that sensitivity training is needed for kindergarten up to twelfth grade students.

"Diversity training is different than bullying training," said Lacey. "This is serious and training needs to start immediately. Kids learn how to behave with one another when teachers set the example. Racism is real in the Daniel Boone School District. We need zero tolerance in place as soon as possible."

School Board President Andrew Basile said this is the first time in five years, since he has been on the board, that racism "has come up;" he said it's never been an issue in front of the board.

"This starts with you," said Barry Lacey, Douglassville.

A number of residents asked for future teacher in-service days to be a day of sensitivity training.

Otto said he is committed to seeing this through.

"I'm not going to let this go," said Otto, adding, "It's important to me for this to be resolved. There is no negotiating that point -- it needs to move forward. I hope no one needs to question my commitment to moving this forward."