

## Public will get its say about Kick a Jew day at Collier School Board meeting

By KATHERINE ALBERS

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NAPLES -- The students have been punished and the Collier school district is ready to move on, but it will likely get an earful from the public about 'kick a Jew day' first.

Superintendent Dennis Thompson asked that the issue be placed on the Collier County School Board's agenda for its meeting Thursday. Thompson will address the incident that took place at North Naples Middle School and led to 10 students being disciplined for kicking other students.

Then, members of the public will get to have their say.

If the response received by the school district about the incident is any indication, it's bound to be a well-attended meeting.

Thompson has said he has received phone calls, letters and e-mails from individuals locally and as far away as Israel and Texas advocating that the students be suspended longer or expelled from public schools for good.

Sandy Parker, president of the League of Women Voters of Collier County, said she plans to attend the meeting.

Parker said she feels community members should let the school board know how they feel about the incident.

"I want to go to the meeting to express, on behalf of myself and members of our board, how upset, appalled and disturbed we were by the incident that took place," she said. "It's a sad statement about our community that such a thing happened here."

At least one School Board member will have something to say as well.

Richard Calabrese has called the incident "a hate crime."

Calabrese said he does not believe a one day in-school suspension is punishment enough. He said he believes the students responsible should have to visit the Holocaust Museum of Southwest Florida and read "The Diary of Anne Frank." He said the students should also have to write a paper about what they have learned.

Calabrese said since the story broke about the incident, he has received five to 10 e-mails from constituents daily.

Thompson has said people should know the incident, which sparked national attention and has led to an overwhelming response from the public, was not spawned by religious intolerance. Instead, he said, it was inspired by an episode of the cartoon show "South Park" and the social networking site Facebook.

"It wasn't 'kick a Jew day.' It was a 'kick a fill-in-the-blank day,'" Thompson told the Daily News last week. "Many of the kids who kicked other students kicked someone they didn't like or someone who is different."

Though one girl complained that she was kicked because she was Jewish, others who were kicked on Nov. 19 became victims for other reasons, Thompson said, adding that two of the students who participated in the kicking incidents were Jewish.

The school district's staff and board members are not the only ones receiving responses about the incident.

The city of Naples has also received e-mails regarding the November incident, Naples Mayor Bill Barnett said Wednesday.

Since the beginning of the month, his office has fielded three or four e-mails asking Barnett what is taught in the school system to allow something like this to happen. But Barnett said it's important for people to know – especially those outside of Florida – that there's nothing he or Naples City Council could do about the incident.

"The whole incident was disgraceful, but we are not commingled with the school board," Barnett said. "We have the same feelings everyone else does, but there's nothing I can do as mayor or we can do as a council."

Some letter writers also told Barnett they would not travel to Naples because of this.

However, Barnett said he doesn't think the incident will have an adverse affect on the Naples community.

"It was an incident that happened at a school," he said. "It doesn't portray what this community is about. I don't think anyone is going to cancel a trip (because of this)."

Barnett said he finds the incident disgraceful.

"At an initial glance, I don't feel like a one day in-school suspension was enough, but, on the other hand, I probably don't know all of the facts," he said. "I can only hope there were more lessons learned from (this) than anything else."

The Collier County School District has a policy on bullying and harassment and the students were disciplined in accordance with that policy, district officials have said.

The students received a one day, in-school suspension. The parents of the 10 students were also called and conferences with the parents followed the phone calls, according to District Spokesman Joe Landon.

Parents of the students who were kicked were also notified of what happened, Landon said.

Landon said until further notice, the school will focus the first 20 minutes of each day on character traits, beginning with respect and kindness. Homeroom teachers will speak with the students about these traits and will focus on bullying prevention, he said. Videos on the topic will be sought out and used as part of the training, he said.

Staff writer Jenna Buzzacco contributed to this report.

