



Hilliard City School District

David Stewart, Superintendent • Brian W. Wilson, Treasurer

January 18, 2023 - This statement is from Hilliard City Schools Superintendent David Stewart.

Hilliard City Schools is committed to a transparent and vigorous defense against this lawsuit, which is notably filled with misstatements of fact and mischaracterizations. We look forward to filing our response with the court. In the meantime, the lawsuit makes certain accusations which have little to do with the legal arguments, but about which we believe it is important to set the record straight – with facts.

Specifically:

- The use of “surveys” with students. The lawsuit raises the issue of questionnaires that our teachers use to get to know their students better at the beginning of the school year. An example used in the lawsuit included questions about what pronouns a student prefers the teacher use when referring to them and what pronouns the student wants used in communications between the school and parents. While this was not a practice of the district’s or even a majority of our teachers, when this issue was brought to my attention, I made clear to our administration that Hilliard City Schools does not support surveying students on this topic or in this context of getting to know new students.

Since that time, we have followed up and every teacher and administrator in every building should be aware of our guidance on this issue. While it may not be best practice, it is not illegal.

- The wearing of “I’m Here” badges by teachers. These badges were issued by the Hilliard Education Association (the teachers’ union) for teachers to show support for students in the LGBTQ+ community and support fair treatment of every student. The front of the badges, the part visible to students, simply read – “I’m Here” – with colored stripes symbolizing support of LGBTQ+ rights. And that is all.

The backs of the badges included a QR code for teachers that provided a link to websites with support resources. We learned that by clicking out from some of those support resources, it was possible to arrive at objectionable material inappropriate for students. I discussed this with the

Ready For Tomorrow



Hilliard Education Association president and we immediately agreed that the QR codes on the backs of the badges should be covered so that they would not be visible in any way when being worn by teachers. That has been done and we are not aware of any student accessing the QR code or materials.

- The roles of counselors vs. teachers. The lawsuit calls for counselors, not teachers, to be called in when issues arise concerning a student's medical or mental health. We agree. Indeed, the single example cited in the lawsuit involves a student exhibiting the need for mental health counseling who was taken to a professional social worker. The social worker then contacted and met with the student's parents.

We live in challenging times with complicated issues – for students, parents, teachers and school administrators. Making broad-brush accusations such as those in this lawsuit detract from the district's mission and the educational efforts of our dedicated staff and teachers. In Hilliard City Schools we work to prepare our students so that they are Ready for Tomorrow and we do this in partnership with students and their families. We will continue to do this for every child we serve, without exception.