



EDUCATION

'Family has suffered enough': Broward school employee's disciplinary action postponed again

BY ALECIA TAYLOR

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Jessica and Gary Norton, parents of a transgender student and volleyball player formerly of Monarch High School, leave a Broward County School Board meeting at Plantation High School, Tuesday, July 23, 2024. The board delayed voting on the mother's school district employment status for another week. (Joe Cavaretta/South Florida Sun Sentinel) JOE CAVARETTA *Joe Cavaretta*

The decision to terminate a Broward Public Schools employee who is the mother of a transgender student at the heart of an ongoing sports scandal was delayed by school board members, again. In its Tuesday meeting, board members decided that they needed additional information.

The employee in question is Jessica Norton, an information specialist and JV volleyball coach at Monarch High School. She had been removed from her job along with several other employees after an investigation was launched last November by then-Superintendent Peter Licata for “allegations of improper student participation in sports.” Norton’s daughter, who is transgender, had been participating on the school’s volleyball team in violation of a state law, known as “Fairness in Women’s Sports Act,” which prohibits female students who were born male from playing on female sports teams.

Last month Norton [spoke out publicly for the first time](#) at a school board meeting, telling members she was not there to “beg” for her job but to speak about the “careless actions by the district’s leadership” and its effect on her family and daughter. She attended Tuesday’s meeting but did not speak during the public comments section.

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School board members went back and forth for nearly an hour and a half during the meeting questioning the investigation performed by the Broward District Special Investigative Unit and asking for supplemental information.

Board member Jeff Holness questioned investigators on if they referred to Norton’s daughter with the pronoun “it” during the investigation.

But investigators said that only happened after a repartee with the mother and the investigator started a sentence with the word “it.”

However, Michael Rajner, the chair of the Broward County Human Rights Board, read from the transcript of a conversation between detective Thomas Honan of the Broward District Special Investigative Unit, and James Cecil, the principal at Monarch.

“You had no idea that ‘it’ was a biological male that you were dealing with,” Rajner read aloud to the board during public comment, attributing this to Honan.

During the meeting it was clear there was no consensus on whether Norton should be terminated, suspended or face other consequences.

Board member Torey Alston said while he already made up his mind on whether to suspend or terminate Norton, he still wanted to see a “data informed” decision of past district actions where an employee has broken the law and suggested they hold off on a decision until they had more information.

“I would love for the board to actually see a list of individuals who have broken state law, what those actions are or the actions the board took versus what was the recommended action of the district,” he said. Alston did not state whether he was in favor of suspension or termination.

Holness strongly opposed tabling the discussion due to some of the board members’ requests.

“I do not support delaying this,” he said. “I think this family has suffered enough. I think the child has suffered enough.”

Nora Rupert, representative for District 7 who was not present at the meeting but called in, said she opposed both the suggested 10 day suspension and termination of the Broward employee and mom.

But vice chair Debra Hixon said Norton’s actions “crossed a lot of different lines.”

“She didn’t understand the severity of what she did,” said Hixon. “Her protecting her child, her daughter, affected so many other people and children.”

Hixon originally suggested a suspension of 10 days and for Norton to not hold a position where she could change records. Part of the complaint against Norton had to do with her presenting the district with her daughter’s birth certificate, which indicated her gender as female, though she was born male.

Board member Sarah Leonardi said that the legislation that has come out in the past few years has been confusing and cautioned that the district will have difficulty sifting out documents that may have incorrect or “falsified” information.

Brenda Fam said it is unfair and impossible to put the responsibility on the district to investigate every aspect of a student’s identity.

“What happened here is that we were lied to, and we rely on what we’ve been told. And we believe that until someone gives us the reason for the doubt not to believe,” Fam said.

After additional debate on whether to postpone the decision, the board adopted Alston’s recommendation and will resume the discussion as early as next week.

Norton left the meeting after the board postponed their decision on her fate within the district.

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