

MUSKEGO-NORWAY SCHOOL DISTRICT

# Board moves two policies regarding gender identity

Despite parents' opposition,  
president says majority  
of district supports them

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MUSKEGO — The Muskego-Norway School Board moved one step closer to amending two district policies which opponents say could be detrimental to LGBTQ+ students, the latest of similar policies passed around Waukesha County.

“Just consider, seriously, how your actions can have unintended consequences for our students,” Ann Zielke said in a meeting last month, speaking against the policies.

In a meeting Monday night, the board unanimously passed the amendments to the district’s administrative guidelines, which could be given final approval at the board’s next meeting, Jan. 16. The amendments were first introduced at the Nov. 14 board meeting.

One policy would require written or electronic authorization from a parent or legal guardian in order for a student to change their preferred name, pronouns or gender in order to be used at school. This wouldn’t apply to “commonly accepted” name shortenings like William to Will, board documents say. A similar policy was passed in the Arrowhead School District in September.

“Parents have every right to know if their kids want to change their name or have pronouns used,” board member Kevin Zimmermann said to The Freeman in an email. “The school district shall not hide anything from parents for this matter.”

The other policy is related to imagery in classrooms and says district employees should avoid displaying things such as symbols, graphics or flags in classrooms, emails or personal items that would suggest the employee’s political or religious viewpoints. This is in addition to existing policy which says employees should refrain

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# Policy

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from using position or public property for partisan political or religious purposes, according to district documents. A similar policy passed in the Kettle Moraine School District in August.

“School is a place for learning not someone’s political/religious views,” Zimmermann said. “Only items that should be on the walls in the classroom should be things currently being taught in that class, that’s it.”

Other board members responded to request for comment on the policies and parents’ concerns with them.

A recording of Monday’s board meeting had not been posted as of Tuesday evening, but at the Nov. 14 School Board meeting the board did not publicly discuss these policies. Board President Chris Buckmaster said that school policies, like these, are reviewed based on what “the majority of the district” wants.

## Opposition at November meeting

At the November meeting, which is available on the school district’s YouTube channel, four parents spoke against these policies, saying they have the potential to be harmful to LGBTQ+ students, a particularly vulnerable group.

Jessica Pemble asked the board to explain the policy on political and religious imagery, asking if posters of presidents would be allowed under this revised policy. Superintendent Kelly Thompson said imagery that reflects an individual’s beliefs is not allowed, or if the imagery leans in one way over another.

“Most situations in schools we do have to have a conversation...,” Thompson said.

“Is that going to include rainbow flags and things like that?” Pemble asked.

“Well, if there are flags and things that represent a particular political party or —” Kelly said.

“But does a rainbow flag actually represent a political party?” Pemble asked.

“If it leans toward a particular political entity, then we would have a discussion about that.”

Pemble asked if a cross necklace would be subject to this policy. Thompson said that is allowed.

“Why?” Pemble asked. “How is that allowed but other things aren’t? ... I just feel this is really a gray area and you guys are creating more of a problem than there ever has been.”

Thompson said that addressing this policy is to provide more clarity for staff.

“I guess for me it sounds almost silly to say that those flags have a political leaning or a religious leaning since I’m also a very conser-

vative Lutheran and have never voted anything but a straight Republican ticket, but I love my child and I support them and so I still have a pride flag hanging in my office,” Lisa Ohland, the mother of a trans child, said at the meeting.

Ohland said that having visible symbols of support, such as a pride flag, can let LGBTQ+ students know which staff they can trust and help them find a safe space.

“A lot of them don’t have that in their home,” Ohland said. “My child does, I regularly have several of their friends, also from Muskego High School, at my house because they know that’s a safe space for them and they don’t have that home.”

Board Treasurer Tracy Blair responded, saying that the Muskego-Norway School District has teachers that look out for all students.

“Instead of forcing teachers to potentially out trans and non-binary students, we should be working to protect our trans youth and support each student in their individual journey,” Zielke said at the meeting, citing a study that found that 42% of LGBTQ+ youth seriously considered attempting suicide in the last year. “Policies like this do nothing to better the lives or educational experiences of our students, and the real potential to put the lives of our trans and non-binary students at risk.”