

I would like to take a few moments to address the recent sentencing of Chris Willman and charges brought against Frank Reppert. Both of these former Palisades teachers were entrusted to keep our children safe while in school and both violated that trust. As a community we have every right to be outraged by the actions of these two individuals.

As I reflect on these events, my first reaction is to question what could have been done to prevent such perverse actions. Did we miss anything in the interview process? As a member of numerous hiring committees in this district I know that a committee of teachers, administrators, parents, students and Board members participate in several rounds of interviews of those candidates who have cleared their criminal background checks. In addition, once the committee reduces the pool to one or two finalists, references that are on the application as well as those that are not on the reference list are contacted to learn more about the candidate's prior work experiences. In addition, the Board has instituted mandatory drug testing for finalists before they are approved by the Board. Clearly, if there was any belief throughout the interview process, however remote, that either Willman or Reppert would have behaved as they did, the Board would not have hired these individuals. The Board recognizes that there are always opportunities to improve our practices. Moving forward I've asked Dr. O'Connell to review additional screening tools that are used to identify a child predator through the interview process and report her findings back to the Board.

I then shifted my thinking from the interview process to what we have in place by way of training and reporting of suspicious behavior. All teachers are required by state law to complete a three hour mandated reporter training. This training educates those working with children what the signs of abuse look like and their obligation to report. The threshold for reporting is extremely low and these reports go to Children and Youth, the police and the Pennsylvania Department of Education. This is the "see something, say something" approach used throughout our nation to combat terrorism but is also used in many companies. In the cases of Willman and Reppert, reporting by individuals led to employment, criminal, Children and Youth and PDE investigations. As soon as an allegation or simply the feeling of something not seeming quite right was raised, an investigation was opened by each of the agencies listed above. Both employees were immediately placed on leave while the investigations were occurring.

While mandated reporter training is only required every 5 years, all teachers are going through the training again on January 20th. NOVA has also provided the Stewards of Children training as recently as August of this year, which focuses on childhood abuse and trauma and a similar training will occur in the upcoming months. NOVA is also hosting a session titled Stewards of Children - for the Caregiver on Thursday, January 23rd in the high school library at 6:30PM. All parents are encouraged to attend.

In addition to reviewing screening tools used in the hiring process and additional training on recognizing the signs of abuse, the Board, through the policy committee, will consider a new policy titled "maintaining professional adult/student boundaries". Once this policy comes out of committee it will be on upcoming Board meetings for a first and second read. Through this

policy the board will ensure that annual notification of the policy and applicable training is provided to students, parents and employees.

In conclusion, as Dr. O'Connell stated following Chris Willman's sentencing, I and the Board would like to thank the PA State Police Dublin Barracks and the Bucks County District Attorney's Office for their investigation into and prosecution of Chris Willman. I also I commend those that brought forth the allegations of misconduct and admire the amazing courage of the victims to end Chris Willman's abhorrent behavior.