

School Board vetoes banquet policy

Written by Mark Jaeger

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Committee sought to discourage school groups from holding events at locations where alcohol is served

Members of the Northern Ozaukee School Board took heavy fire at Monday's board meeting on a proposed policy that would have restricted school-sanctioned gatherings to places where alcohol is not served.

The protests came largely from members of the Gridiron Club, which hosted a post-season celebration for the high school and youth football programs at the Belgium Community Center.

The banquet drew about 300 people. Beer was not served at the event, but was readily available elsewhere in the center and organizers conceded that several parents brought drinks into the banquet room.

The proposed policy, which was crafted by the board's Policy Committee, said the district "strongly discourages" holding school-authorized gatherings where alcohol is available.

Instead, the policy said such gatherings should be held in school facilities "whenever feasible."

Varsity football coach Jim Lippe and members of the Gridiron Club spoke vehemently against the policy, contending it was aimed specifically at them.

"I firmly believe that the venue helps define the event. I would prefer to have our banquet at a nice hotel, but we don't have anything like that in our community. Having a celebration in the cafeteria where these kids have lunch every day is not very special," Lippe said.

He said the board should focus its attention on more important issues in the district, like its steady loss of students and parental discontent with the grading system at the middle school.

"There are real issues this board should be tackling. Every year we are losing students, which means my taxes keep going up," Lippe said.

Assistant football coach Scott Yanke, an officer with the Cedarburg Police Department, said the support of the Gridiron Club has contributed to the improved perception of athletics in Fredonia.

"We started with a goal of bringing back pride by our kids and our community," Yanke said.

"This was a fun event for the kids, and I believe school should be fun — instead of just throwing down some pizzas on a table in the cafeteria."

Board member Tom Hoffmann, chairman of the Policy Committee, said the policy was being proposed to clear up inconsistencies between the district's ban on smoking and drinking and conduct at sanctioned events.

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Hoffmann said the policy was patterned after one in place in the Denmark School District, and would protect the district from liability should an alcohol-related incident occur at a school event.

“I think the football reception was done correctly, but what if another group wants to hold an event in the future and asks us how to do it?” Hoffmann said.

Supt. Bill Harbron said the policy would give the administration guidelines for future decisions that minimize risk for the district.

The district frequently adopts policies before a problem arises, Harbron said.

“We hope nobody would ever embezzle, but our auditor required us to put into place a policy on embezzling,” he said.

Harbron said the policy would reinforce the district’s position against alcohol and tobacco use by student athletes.

The explanation did little to sway other board members.

“We already have many layers of policies on alcohol use,” said board member Tim Burmesch.

Board member Rick Hamm was even more skeptical of the value of the policy.

“How can you tell parents they can’t drink? This shouldn’t be anything we should be dealing with,” Hamm said. “Students should have the opportunity to see alcohol being used responsibly.

“It feels like we are in Congress, and we are being asked to pass a law because we have nothing else to do.”

By board protocol, the first reading of a proposed policy gives officials a chance to address concerns, but several board members felt it was not worth even attempting to clarify the policy.

Rather than returning the matter to the committee, the board voted 6-3 to drop the issue outright.

Hoffmann was joined by Paul Krause and Stacie Stark in contending the question should at least be studied further.