

Family, supporters want Conroe ISD action over racist student-to student Snapchat

By Jay R. Jordan, jjordan@hcnonline.com Published 8:39 pm, Tuesday, October 17, 2017



Photo: Catherine Dominguez

Randall Kallinen, civil rights attorney, speaks to media before a Conroe ISD board meeting Tuesday, Oct. 27, 2017.

Family and supporters of a black female who attends The Woodlands High School Ninth Grade Campus confronted Conroe ISD board members Tuesday night regarding the district's lack of action after a classmate reportedly sent the girl a racist Snapchat message in September.

Last month, a white male student allegedly sent messages over the social media application Snapchat in which he told the girl, "we should have hung all you n****s while we had the chance and trust me it would make the world better." Fearing her for safety, the girl and her family reached out to school officials, who offered crisis counseling services, according to her attorneys. The district also offered for the girl to transfer schools in light of the message.

For A.J. King, the girl's father, that action wasn't enough. "We feel like we've been sent on a wild goose chase," King told Conroe ISD trustees in a packed boardroom Tuesday night. "What message are you sending to those 4,500 (black) students if you don't take proper action and have zero tolerance for this kid? If you don't take action, (that says) you condone what's going on. There needs to be clear action taken. This kid needs to be removed, and this communication needs to go out to the entire district that says 'we're not tolerating this kind of behavior.' Because my daughter is traumatized and walking on eggshells." The district, in a statement issued Tuesday night, said it has not acted in any manner supporting racism.

"The District, within the bounds of state and federal law, has done everything it can to address the concerns raised by the female student's family," the statement read. "No employee of Conroe ISD has condoned racism in any form or acted in any manner that could be characterized as supporting it." The district also has been coordinating a meeting between the

Kings and the family of the student who sent the message at the request of the Kings, according to the statement.

"Conroe ISD believes that all children are precious and worthy," the statement read. "We will continue to work with students to foster their understanding of and respect for diversity and are committed to implementing programs to support these efforts."

King, his wife Latoika King and their daughters moved to The Woodlands in July 2016 from Michigan after hearing about the community's good qualities and world-renowned gymnastics programs. Months after the move, he said, his same daughter who was subject to the Snapchat message in September was confronted with another racist comment.

In the days after the election of President Donald Trump, a classmate of hers asked her if she was "worried about getting shipped back to Africa," the father said. "Kids say dumb things," King said. "She wanted me to come pick her up. She was pretty traumatized and crying, but I told her, 'That's not going to be the last time you're going to hear something like that. I want you to suck this one up.' But these past three weeks, this was something that I could not give her the message to suck it up."

In a letter provided by King's attorneys, The Woodlands High School Ninth Grade campus Principal Jill Houser told the girl's parents the student who sent the message was "issued stipulations that will minimize the possibility of contact with the other student," by changing his schedule and limiting his access to electronic devices.

During a conversation with the principal, King said she told him and his wife to report the incident to police. County Attorney J D Lambright, whose office is tasked with prosecuting minors in the county, said the student's action did not rise to a criminal matter – but could be considered harassment if it continues.

In the most recent state Legislature, state lawmakers passed what's called David's Law, which expands school districts' abilities to take action on off-campus cyber-bullying involving students. The law is named after 16-year-old David Molak, a student at Alamo Heights High School in San Antonio who committed suicide after an Instagram taunt about his girlfriend escalated to multiple profane messages and threats.

The law allows districts, such as Conroe ISD, to expel a student who, among other things, "incites violence against a student through group bullying." While it seems as though the message was sent from one student, the Kings' Houston-based civil rights attorney, Randall Kallinen, said the message was plenty threatening.

He also spoke, along with about a half-dozen other Conroe ISD parents and activists, urging the board to take some sort of action. "What we see here is reason for the Conroe Independent School District board to act," Kallinen told the board. "You are the governing body. You are above the superintendent. You are above the principals. You make the policy. I was surprised when I got here that all the other speakers in front of me were talking about the same thing. There is a huge outcry, and the outcry is not ending."

The board had not taken any action regarding the Snapchat issue or the student in question as of Tuesday night.