

ANDOVER PUBLIC SCHOOLS



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Statement of the Andover School Committee

In the wake of the investigation into the conduct of the boys' volleyball team coach, EJ Perry, and the inadvertent release of a confidential personnel document by Superintendent Berman, we feel it is important to make clear to the community where we stand as the School Committee.

First, both of these incidents confirm what we all know to be true: people are human and not infallible. The outcome of the investigation demonstrates that the high school leadership is willing to move forward and offer a chance to do better. We support their decision, recognizing that they have access to substantially more information than we do. Similarly, while the accidental release of a confidential personnel document is extremely unfortunate, we are willing to move forward and offer a chance to do better. Coach Perry and Superintendent Berman both made apologies, and it is our understanding that those apologies have been accepted by those directly affected. It appears that everyone directly involved is ready to move on.

Second, we understand that residents have widely differing views on the situation. We have received feedback from those who believe the coach should be fired; believe the suspension, investigation and findings are unjust; believe the superintendent should be fired; and are concerned about the perpetuation of unfounded conspiracy theories and the harm they inflict on Andover students. We appreciate this feedback and remind the community that the School Committee has no legal authority to take action with respect to district staff. With respect to matters we are authorized to address, at a future meeting we intend to discuss formalization of a coaching code of conduct, reinforcement of our expectations for all those involved in AHS athletics, and codification of the district's standard procedures for investigations into alleged misconduct. Moreover, we have addressed the superintendent's error with him.

Third, we note that terrible damage can be done by those who rush to condemn others without knowing all (or even any) of the facts. Attacks against students on social media by adults are particularly abhorrent, and as adults we need to model the kind of behavior we would hope for from others if one of our own children was involved. We all hold responsibility for creating a culture where those concerned about harm will raise matters without trepidation to those who can help make them safe.

Finally, we want to leave no doubt about where we stand on the issue of abusive or discriminatory treatment of Andover's students. It is not acceptable and it will not be tolerated. We believe that when the district receives allegations of such treatment which appear to be credible, as is standard practice for any investigation into such allegations, the individual accused should be placed on leave until the district can determine the facts. We understand that some residents feel this is a rush to judgment, and we do not expect we can change their minds. However, we are confident in this best practice and we see no reason to depart from it. The risk of making a mistake here is too great: we cannot allow an accused staff member to continue to work with our children simply because we personally find it difficult to believe that he or she did anything wrong. None of us in the community ever have all of the information, and there is almost always another side (or more) to the story. Our children rely on us to protect them, and if we cannot do that, then we have failed them as parents and as leaders.