

SKSD gender policy receives support

By Elisha Meyer Port Orchard Independent • April 27, 2023 1:30 am

The conversation on gender-inclusion policies of the South Kitsap School District continued April 19, with several community members speaking in favor of it.

It had been just over a month since the board chambers was packed with signs and angry parents who expressed frustrations over the language of the policy: “Gender Inclusive Schools” and a guidance document related to the policy titled “It’s the Right Thing to Do, and it’s the Law.”

The language specified that a teacher should not “disclose a student’s transgender or gender-expansive status to others, including the student’s parents/guardians...” with exceptions for legal requirements or the student’s consent. Superintendent Tim Winter presented a new document editing the language to members of the gallery March 15, however, the overall language remained the same.

Chrissey Wiley was one of the attendees of the March meeting expressing favor for the policy and, one month later, was back again. “I want to say, again, thank you to the board, thank you to the school district, and thank you to Washington State for taking a stand to protect kids...to give them a safe environment, to learn, to be themselves and to grow into citizens and leaders of tomorrow.”

Several community members and teachers followed suit. Douglas Urner, a teacher at South Kitsap High School, talked about what he’s seen in his classroom and said, as an educator and parent, the elimination of schools as a safe place for students would be detrimental.

“I can tell you from first-hand experience in the classroom the difference it makes to LGBTQ students when we see them, when they feel safe to be their authentic selves,” he said. “In my classroom, I’ve seen the way students’ academic performance and their mental health improve when they can be themselves, and I don’t think I’m being hyperbolic if I say I think you’re saving lives when you do that.”

Scott Brown of Southworth added to the point of Urner as a homosexual man who grew up “in an environment of sexual harassment,” saying education could not be accomplished without students’ right to choose their identity. “As a former ESL educator, I know that the key to a student’s learning, their development and developing the life skills to be a productive citizen lies in their freedom and feeling of safety,” he said.

But what constitutes the need for a safe place? That question was brought up by Amanda O’Dell, one of the most outspoken participants in last month’s protest. While she said she has no issue with the LGBTQ+ and trans community, she wondered who would be making the decision for a minor to not be classified as safe in their house, reminding the board that minors are minors for a reason.

“Last I checked, teachers, administrators, physicians have to report abuse. They’re required by law, and they can do time, (be) fined, go to prison for not reporting it when they know it,” she said. “So I’m wondering who makes the decision that the home is unsafe. A 10-, a 12-year-old child who’s pissed off at their parents because they got their Gameboy taken away?”