

## Disturbing act at Washburn High School - Frequently asked questions (1-22-13)

On Friday, January 11, a small group of students at Washburn High School engaged in a disturbing activity that involved dangling a dark-skinned baby doll by its neck with a piece of string. Students recorded the incident and images were posted on social media sites.

Such inappropriate behavior is intolerable in our school and school district, both of which are full of diversity and rich in culture.

**Q: Who were the students that hung the doll?**

**A:** Data privacy laws prevent us from sharing the names of the students, but please know that we responded immediately to address the incident with the students.

**Q: What race were the students involved?**

**A:** Data privacy laws prevent us from sharing demographic information about the students, including race, age and grade in school.

**Q: What was their motivation? Did they understand the weight of their actions? Was this a threat?**

**A:** Data privacy laws prevent us from sharing any student information including information related to the questions posed. MPS is facilitating a community forum to listen, learn and foster respect and understanding among all of our diverse students and families. We are partnering with the community to provide ongoing opportunities for all students, staff, families and community members to participate in restorative practices.

**Q: What are “restorative practices?”**

**A:** Restorative practices are a way for those impacted by an incident as a community to repair harm, hear the perspectives of others and come to a shared understanding and possible decision on next steps. This method builds relationships and welcomes individuals back into a community after they have made a mistake so they may repair harm in a safe place.

**Q: What MPS policy did the involved students violate?**

**A:** Data privacy laws prevent us from sharing any student information including information related to the question posed. The MPS discipline policies can be found in Policy 5200 - City-Wide Student Discipline Policy:  
<http://policy.mpls.k12.mn.us/UPcms/PolicyFiles/5200.pdf>

**Q: Are students being disciplined?**

**A:** Because student information is private, we cannot share any information about the students involved or the disciplinary action that may have been taken. Washburn follows the school district's code of conduct in addressing any instance of inappropriate behavior. We are partnering with the community to provide ongoing opportunities for all students, staff, families and community members to participate in restorative practices.

**Q: What is the MPS policy on suspensions?**

**A:** Generally, suspensions are from one to five days, but may be extended depending on the extent of the behavior. See Policy 5200B: <http://policy.mpls.k12.mn.us/UPcms/PolicyFiles/5200b.pdf>

**Q: How did the school respond?**

**A:** Washburn staff members learned of the act after school on Friday, January 11, and took immediate action. The following week, Washburn leadership held a staff meeting with Washburn employees to debrief about the situation and support them in addressing student concerns. MPS has been providing support for students through school counselors and other staff. We are promoting open dialogue between students and staff in order to learn from this unfortunate act and create opportunities to talk about race and respect.

Washburn held a student assembly on Tuesday, January 22, to talk about the incident, its impact on the student body and how the school community plans to move forward. (Continued on back.)

On Wednesday, January 23, community facilitators representing various racial justice and racial equity groups joined Washburn students during their regularly scheduled Enrichment Support Opportunities session to engage in guided and constructive conversations about the incident and the students' recommendations in addressing the issues.

Teachers plan to continue to call upon the support of these community facilitators to deepen their engagement with students and staff on this issue. Washburn Student Government is working directly with the school's principal in designing a response strategy that incorporates community, student and staff feedback from the ongoing events.

**Q: What time did this happen? How long did it last?**

**A:** The incident began around 1:40 p.m., during fifth period. It lasted 15-20 minutes, continuing into the passing time between fifth and sixth periods.

**Q: Were there witnesses to the event?**

**A:** Yes, there were student and staff witnesses.

**Q: How was the incident reported?**

**A:** A staff member noticed the inappropriate behavior, which prompted review of security cameras that recorded the incident.

**Q: How are students being supported?**

**A:** We understand that this situation may cause feelings of anger, disappointment, confusion and embarrassment for some students. MPS has been providing support for students through school counselors, social workers, other staff members, student leaders and community groups. We are promoting open dialogue between students and staff in order to learn from this unfortunate act and create opportunities to talk about race and respect.

**Q: Why did parents find out so late?**

**A:** Our first response focused on responding to and supporting students and staff members. Information was distributed to parents once complete details were gathered and confirmed, five days after the act occurred. Unfortunately, although a letter was sent to families on Wednesday, January 16, some parents may not have received it right away due to a technical error. A recorded phone call was sent to families on the evening of Thursday, January 17, and the letter was posted to our website.

**Why did MPS cancel after-school activities on Thursday, January 17?**

**A:** MPS was made aware of threats related to a meeting occurring that night late in the day on January 17. Due to the short timeframe, the school district was not able to fully investigate whether the threats were valid and formulate an appropriate response in order to ensure the safety of students, staff and event spectators. MPS takes all threats seriously.

**Q: What can parents do to help?**

**A:** Parents can help their students by teaching them about appropriate behavior, empathy and how to report concerns to the school administrators and trusted adults at school or elsewhere.

**Q: Why have a community forum?**

**A:** We want to address the act and promote discussion and healing. MPS is facilitating the community forum to listen, learn and foster respect and understanding among all of our diverse students and families. It is important to provide a safe space for all to come and share their stories, experiences and ideas for solutions.

**Q: How did students post these photos on social media so quickly? Does MPS have a policy on social media during school hours? Does MPS offer student trainings?**

**A:** We work to inform parents about the realities and risks of social networking. We share conversations they should be having with their children about online safety, being civil online and how to ask for help if they feel unsafe or are worried about the impact of something they see. We remind parents that they can protect their children by monitoring social media feeds, blocking individuals who are engaging in electronic aggression and being involved with the school or local law enforcement if there is a threat or behavior that is actionable or if their student needs additional support.