

Request to Address the Board of Trustees

I, Michelle Lambert, am requesting to address to address the Board of Trustees on October 16, 2007.

X Michelle C. Lambert
Date: Sept 25, 2007

I'd like to thank the board for this opportunity to speak.

I believe there is a situation, although being common sense, is not common practice. This is a time to focus on ways not only to protect children, but also prevent something terrible from occurring. I, myself, am not an angry nor vindictive parent, but because of what has happened to my daughter and to other girlfriends of hers, I can see the need to protect both students and school authorities.

To explain this, I need to give you a little background. We all know children will try to get away with as much as they can, and my daughter, Samantha, tries to push the boundaries more often than not. She's no angel but still a good kid. Unfortunately, she did get into a fist fight with another girl during the summer and the other girl filed a complaint with the OPD. Once school started, the two girls were sharing a class. The other girl brought her copy of the complaint to the school requesting Sammi taken out of her class. I didn't have a problem with this.

Permian's policy is to prevent retaliation and keep the peace, so they try to talk to the kids to keep things from happening. I have no problem with this either. Rumors began circulating around Permian that my Sammi was wanting to fight the girl again because of the complaint. A vice principal and a district police officer, both male, went during class time to find my daughter. Sammi was trying to find her new class when she stopped them in the hallway for directions.

The vice principal realized who she was and said he wanted to speak with her. She asked if she was in trouble. He replied, "I don't know, you tell me." He motioned to an empty classroom (which I've been told is common practice) and told her to go inside. Remember this was during class time. Being apprehensive, she looked over her shoulder and saw the two men as the vice principal looked over his shoulder down an empty hallway.

She opened the door to a pitch black room and unfortunately, her first thought was that she was about to be raped. The officer stepped in behind her and flipped on the light and indicated for her to take a seat. After the vice principal closed the door behind him, both men took seats in front of her. At this time, because of her anxiety, she's admitted to only half listening. She believed they were about to suspend and arrest her, that she would spend the next two years in the youth center. What they were actually saying was that it COULD happen.

Even though the school has the right, even obligation, to inform the students of repercussions, my concern is how it is done and who does it. Which brings us to another incident, because of my inquiries, one of my girls' friends came to me with something that happened to her at Permian last year. Rumors again had caused concern and she was taken to the same vice principal's office and behind a closed door, a male district police officer patted her down in search of drugs. She related that she was scared to death, even knowing she wasn't hiding anything, and she was "freaked out that a man was touching her that way." She felt totally embarrassed and ashamed by the incident.

In the private sector, Mervyn's for example, when a female of any age is suspected of a crime, it is common practice for a female employee to be present for any search or questioning and that female remains until the situation is resolved. This is to have a witness for both parties. This is a civil right, but not common practice in our school system.

Because of this incident, I've been made aware of another issue, notification to parents about actions towards or with the children. Right now it is a 24 hour period at Permian, as a parent, I feel this also needs to change. I deal with problems as they come up. My Sammi is a 16 year old walking emotion and if she had taken the event differently, she might have reacted badly and ran away. I wouldn't have even known about the confrontation until the next day.

In this day and age, even the slightest of actions or words can be misconstrued as harassment. I am totally thankful Sammi's was not one of those times, but another may not be. Don't get me wrong, 99% of any student/teacher conferences are innocent in themselves. My thoughts and concerns are for that potential 1%. It can go both ways, student cries harassment on an innocent teacher or worst case; an adult actually does commit a violation against a student.

So, I propose to amend, actually add to the FNF (Local) Student Rights and Responsibilities: Interrogations and Searches, to have a female witness present while speaking with a female student. Unless a life threatening concern is imminent, only a female is to physically search or frisk a female student (This is part of the Midland County ISD code) also, to have immediate parent notification of any actions concerning a child. Unfortunately, the only document I could find to take the wording for all the amendments was from international human rights standards, including the U.N. Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Juvenile Prisoners, which means juvenile prisoners have more rights than our students do.

As stated before this is may be common sense but not common practice. By adding these concerns to the existing policy, I believe we can rest easy against any possible occurrences. More than a small amount of liability will be avoided if common sense prevails and become policy and procedure.

Thank you for your time and consideration on this matter.

Michelle Lambert

Policy Addendum: FNF (Local) Students Rights and Responsibilities: Searches and Interrogations.

1. STUDENT INTERROGATIONS AND REPREMANDS. Student questioning shall be conducted only with an officer or member of the same sex gender as the student as a witness.

2. SEARCHING STUDENTS. Members shall search students; students shall be searched immediately for weapons, contraband and items of evidence. Student searches shall be conducted only by an officer or a member of the same sex gender as the student with an officer or member of the same sex gender as a witness.

3. EXIGENT CIRCUMSTANCES. If an officer or a member has knowledge or reasonably believes that a student of the opposite sex has a dangerous weapon concealed upon him or her, the student may be restrained (handcuffed) until search can be made by an officer or member of the same sex gender as the student. Only if there is a life-threatening situation, an officer or a member may search a student of the opposite sex gender.

4. NOTIFICATION AND TELEPHONE CALLS. Take reasonable and immediate steps to notify the student's parent, guardian or responsible relative that the student is in custody and/or being detained for questioning/assessment. Inform the parent or guardian that they may be present during the questioning/assessment or should be accessible by phone to talk with ECISD during the evaluation.