SCHOOLS NEWS >> DOWNERS GROVE NORTH

Teacher resigns amid sexual harassment allegations

No charges filed but police investigation continues; former student encouraging open communication and dialogue

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The Community High School District 99 Board of Education accepted the resignation tendered by a Downers Grove North High School faculty member at its Dec. 11 special meeting.

The teacher, William Miller, is leaving amid sexual harassment allegations recently reported to Downers Grove Police by Jennifer Boudinot, a 1999 graduate of Downers Grove North and a current resident of Woodridge, N.Y.

Superintendent Hank Thiele issued a letter to its students, parents and staff following the special meeting and said they had conducted an investigation with the information available to them. "We are unable to share details on any personnel matters related to current or former employees," the statement read. "We will continue to cooperate fully with the Downers Grove Police Department. Their investigation remains open; no charges have been filed to date."

Miller was placed on administrative leave in mid-November, and he has served as a District 99 employee since 1995.

Under the separation agreement, Miller forfeited his teaching license and agreed not to teach in a K-12 setting again.

"I think it's a good first step, but I think the District 99 Board of Education needs to do more to address the situation," Boudinot said, referring to the board's decision. "How are they helping students during this difficult time? They keep repeating over and over that victims should come forward, but they don't seem to have cultivated a supportive environment that would allow students to feel comfortable doing that. Furthermore, students who weren't victimized don't seem to be getting the guidance they need to frame this issue in a healthy, productive way."

Boudinot said the timing of her recent report to Downers Grove Police was inspired, in part, by the national conversation on sexual harassment surfacing in news media in recent months.

"I was reading in the news about [Alabama's Republican candidate for Senate] Roy Moore, and the culture that allowed him to 'date' teenage girls," she said. "To me, that sounded a lot like what I experienced at DGN in the 90s."

Boudinot made a recent Facebook post asking "Are we ready to talk about this?" She named some teachers in the comments section and went on to identify classmates who shared similar experiences in their encounters with Miller.

"Once we realized that three women had been affected and it seemed like he had a very particular pattern, we became really concerned and knew we had to do something," Boudinot said.

Thiele stressed that there is no time limit for reporting a complaint against any staff member and said the District's door is open to all of its students and staff, regardless if they are currently enrolled or graduated.

"I think [District 99] needs to make it easier for students to come forward, and also give students the skills they need to address sexual harassment outside of the school setting," Boudinot said. "When I was in health class at DGN, they showed us images of genitals infected with [sexually transmitted diseases,] but they never told us the signs of a predator, or told us to tell an adult right away if we knew about a teacher who was giving alcohol to a student, that kind of thing."

Boudinot wanted it to be clear that the District's policies do not go far enough to address the central issue, which is the power dynamic demonstrated in teacher-student relationships.

"Since starting the anonymous 'DGNnightwatchwomen@gmail.com' email address to collect reports of harassment and sexual contact from alumni, I have received many messages from victims of both Bill Miller's, as well as victims of seven other teachers at Downers Grove North," she said. "It's clear to me that the administration that was in place when I attended DGN failed me and my fellow classmates."

Boudinot said more victims "hiding in the shadows" could fear consequences for coming out will be greater for them, compared to those who did the victimizing and urged District 99 to work toward better supporting students for the world ahead of them.

"Show [students] that when they become leaders of companies, film studios, restaurants, and yes—school boards—that they can take a powerful stance against those who don't represent their values and ethics and use that stance to empower those who were hurt," she said. "Please see this not as a reason for Downers Grove North to hide shamefully, but to proudly show that it takes its responsibility to its students seriously, and that painful policies and incidents of the past can be profound guides for meaningful change for the future."

Thiele recognizes that many people in the school community will be impacted by these revelations, and said they are "thankful for the sensitivity and support that our students, staff, families and community have given and will continue to give to one another."

For information on how to file a report, visit www.csd99.org/departments/nondiscrimination-coordinatorscomplaint-managers.