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(Neb.)-Board To Consider Parent Input Before Finalizing Search Policy

By: Chris Fankhauser Posted at: 08/26/2013 08:43 PM

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(Chadron)-School board members heard from several parents at their regularly scheduled meeting Monday night regarding a proposed policy on searches and seizure when it comes to personal electronic devices. The Chadron Public Schools Board of Education had the policy on the agenda for a second reading, but after some suggestions on modifications from legal counsel, it was suggested to merely discuss the policy and gain more input.

Board member Dave Johnson said this is a very touchy subject. He says they as a board need to be doing what they should to protect students from things such as cyber bullying, but also respect their rights and privacy. One parent in attendance did not feel this policy was appropriate as worded. Jeff Broberg said he has a problem with the policy. He stated he had been a correctional officer for several years and understands the burden of proof when it comes to search and seizure, and that the school has lower burden of proof. Broberg told the Board that the policy wording of reasonable doubt needed clarification.

As an example, Broberg told of an instance where a teacher drug his son out of class to visit with the school resource office because the teacher thought Broberg's son about hit the teacher with his car. He said nothing would change teacher's mind that it wasn't the student, but Broberg said he and his family weren't even in town at the time. To the school, he said that constituted reasonable doubt. Broberg said the wording in the policy as it stands also applies to school board when on school property. If there would be any reasonable doubt as to what might be contained on a personal electronic device of a board member, the policy would allow someone to search their phones.

He was also concerned that the school is not held responsible to replace any confiscated phones if lost. Broberg said they are expensive to replace, and most kids have phones, but they belong to parents in most cases. He said searching the contents of the phones also violates the parents' rights if the parent sends a message to child at school, and said it was none of the school's business.

Ryan St. Andre said he fully supported the Board policy on search and seizure. He said as a parent, he trusts the teachers and other authoritative figures to take over the responsibility of the parental figure when the students walk through the doors of the school. He compared it to when the students are at home, and the parents have every right to look through the child's phone, ipad or ipod to make sure they are not hiding anything inappropriate. St. Andre said if someone doesn't want a teacher or principal looking through a student's phone or ipad, they either have something to hide or are afraid their student has something to hide.

He said students also need to learn to use these devices appropriately and not play on them in school. He provided an example of a school district in California that has a policy of cell phones being checked into the office at the beginning of the school day and returned briefly at lunch, and then again at the end of the day. If a student does not submit their phone to the office, they are searched to make sure they aren't carrying their phone. Penalties are administered for those who do not check their phones into the office.

Board Chair Sandy Roes said she appreciated everyone's comments on this difficult topic, and they will take those into consideration. No action was taken on the policy, and it will be revisited at the meeting in October.

(Questions? Comments? Email news@chadrad.com)

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