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Gender policy pushes 'alternative lifestyles,' punishes Christian students, lawsuit says

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By John Agar
jagar@mlive.com

WILLIAMSTON, MI - The gender-identity policy at Williamston Community Schools has come under fire from parents who say it violates their children's right to share conflicting, sincerely held Christian religious beliefs at school.

The parents filed a federal lawsuit against the school district, which approved the policy in November.

The school district "promotes the agenda of alternative sexual lifestyle activists while creating an environment that is hostile toward and disfavors students and families that oppose these policies based upon their sincerely held moral and religious beliefs, and who object to the close interaction of males and females together in intimate settings such as showers, locker rooms and bathroom," attorney David Kallman wrote in the lawsuit.

Schools Superintendent Adam Spina was aware of the lawsuit but said the school district has yet to be served. He declined comment until school officials could review the filing.

Edward and Erin Reynolds, Monica Schafer and Christopher Johncheck, filed suit on behalf of their children and others against the school district and its board members.

The Reynolds removed their two children from the district, about 20 miles east of Lansing.

The parents contend that the district added "specially protected categories of 'sexual orientation,' 'gender expression,' and 'gender identity,' to (the district's) non-discrimination and gender/transgender policies and practices.

"Specifically, Defendants' non-discrimination and gender/transgender policies and practices seek to silence and punish Plaintiffs' sincerely held religious beliefs and viewpoint," Kallman wrote.

The school board adopted the policy in November after several contentious meetings, [the Lansing State Journal reported](#).

It said the school district did not agree to let boys and girls share showers or locker room but allowed all students - not only those who identify as transgender - to ask for other arrangements for bathrooms and locker rooms.

The policy "fosters an educational environment for all students that is safe, welcoming, and free from stigma and discrimination, regardless of sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression," the district's website said.

"(Williamston Community Schools) shall accept the gender identity that each student asserts reflecting the student's legitimately held belief once the student and/or his or her parent/guardian, as appropriate, notifies District administration that the student intends to assert a gender identity that differs from previous representations or records. The District will customize support to allow each student's equal access to the District's educational programs and activities."

The policy covers students, parents, teachers, other staff and volunteers.

"No student will be excluded from participating in, denied the benefits of, or subjected to discrimination under any educational program or activity conducted by the district."

The lawsuit said that the plaintiffs "do not oppose or demean any person for who they truly are as a person" but "sincerely believe the Bible teaches that human beings were created male and female and that gender is neither fluid nor a social construct. Plaintiffs sincerely believe that a person's sex is established by the Creator with its own nature, essential properties, and purpose."

The plaintiffs believe they have a "duty and obligation to live out their faith in all areas of life, including defending their faith in public," without being accused of bullying or harassment.

He said the school distribute wants to "indoctrinate students into believing that alternative sexual lifestyles are approved by all and to shame and blame those who believe it is wrong and immoral."

The lawsuit names as defendants board President Greg Talberg, other school board members who voted in favor of the policy, Christopher Lewis, Nancy Deal, Sarah Belanger, Kathy Hayes, and former member Joel Gerring.

http://www.mlive.com/news/grand-rapids/index.ssf/2018/01/gender_policy_pushes_alternati.html

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