

Dear Ashland School District Parents,

As you have likely heard, last week a former Ashland High School student posted on social media accusations of sexual violence that occurred off-campus, involving a current student. Upon learning of these accusations, our high school administrators immediately contacted law enforcement. Additionally, Superintendent Cusick contacted an independent investigator with expertise in Title IX process and requirements. (Title IX is a federal law which prohibits discrimination based on sex, and covers sexual violence). This person has begun a complete and independent investigation and will report directly to the superintendent and the school board.

We want to be clear about the current situation, especially as stories and rumors are circulating on social media. No on-campus sexual assaults have been reported to the principal, the superintendent or to the Board. The two sexual assaults that were reported in the last thirteen months occurred off campus. Two other sexual assaults that occurred in the last three years, also off campus, were reported recently and are currently under investigation.

High school staff have been working directly with students, including discussing/processing these issues as well as offering counseling services to students and staff. Our first and immediate concern is for the physical and emotional safety of students. **Please know that we respond to all allegations brought to our attention and that no accusation of sexual violence on the AHS campus or any district property has been reported.** (Please visit <http://ashland.k12.or.us/Page.asp?NavID=2822> for Ashland's Title IX compliance information.)

Understandably, parents have asked about the district process when a student comes forward. While we can not speak to any individual case due to confidentiality laws, we can describe how Title IX complaints are handled in Ashland schools. In accordance with the law, as soon as an administrator is made aware of a Title IX complaint (specifically sexual violence), an investigation is begun. Law enforcement is also notified. The survivor has the right to request confidentiality as well as the right not to disclose the name of the perpetrator. It is not uncommon for a survivor to decline to name the perpetrator to school officials or the police. In that case, the district still investigates as best it can; however, without this information, the district's ability to fully respond is limited at best. If a survivor later decides to provide the name of the perpetrator, the district will renew the investigation.

In addition to this, school districts are restricted by federal law from publicly disclosing any discipline given to students. This can sometimes give the impression that "nothing was done", when the reality is that administrators obeyed federal and state law. (For example, the district is prohibited from telling the public whether a student was expelled, suspended, or given other consequences.) We realize that this can be frustrating. However, these laws exist to protect the physical and emotional well-being of all individuals. Additionally, because this current investigation is ongoing, we cannot directly respond to any misstatements or factual errors posted on social media, email, etc. While other individuals are free to speak out as they see fit, the school district must refrain from engaging in any discussion that may breach confidentiality.

Moving forward, we will review the independent report when it is completed, as well as any other information that individuals provide. This will guide us in making thoughtful, productive changes wherever necessary and we will include you, as well as students and staff in this process. Please know how seriously we all view this issue. We are all shaken by the accusations and feel the urgency to act quickly. Concurrently, we must address the immediate emotional needs of students, protect the due process afforded both the accusers and the accused, and continue to educate the 1000+ students on the AHS campus each day.

For this, we need your help. Parents are, of course, the primary educators of their children, and only in partnership with you can we successfully address these issues head-on. We must recognize that keeping kids safe – especially off-campus and outside school hours – will require us to work together in multiple areas.

In addition to continuing to educate and communicate with students and the entire community, the Superintendent is developing a Title IX District Team comprised of parents, community members, staff and students. The purpose will be to discuss the problems both current and past, to learn from other K-12 model Title IX school districts, and to write an action plan for the Ashland School District's ongoing Title IX efforts. This plan will be presented to the community for your feedback and then the plan will be widely disseminated. We ask for your help, ideas, and support. **There are no easy answers, but we believe that if we all work together as a community to educate and support our kids, we will see real progress as we seek to end sexual violence.**

Sincerely,

Jim Westrick, Chair, Ashland School Board
Eva Skuratowicz, Vice-Chair, Ashland School Board
John Williams, Director, Ashland School Board
Deneice Covert Zeve, Director, Ashland School Board
Eric Strong, Director, Ashland School Board
Suzanne Cusick, Superintendent, Ashland School District
Erika Bare, Principal, Ashland High School