

# H-F is listening, but can't speak on student concerns

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Students at Homewood-Flossmoor High School brought their concerns about the school's sexual harassment and assault code to the District 233 school board on Tuesday, April 5, arguing they feel unheard.

School board members thanked the students for sharing their views, but stressed that the law does not allow them to discuss anything about sexual harassment or sexual assault claims or board actions on the issues.

"There are legal implications, and it's not appropriate for me as a public official to discuss them in a meeting, like a board meeting," said Gerald Pauling, president of the District 233 school board. "That is not to say that anyone on the board stands for sexual assault. That is not to say that anyone on this board is not in favor of hearing from students."

Students twice walked out of school in March to draw attention to what they say is the school's lack of attention to their concerns. The protest was sparked by allegations against one male H-F student who reportedly has been accused of

abusing a number of female students.

At the first protest on March 16, school officials gave an estimated 300 students latitude to protest and raise their voices about sexual assault with chants and signs and a march between the South and North Buildings.

Before the second walkout on March 24, school administrators warned students they would be marked absent from class. The second walkout drew between 12 and 15 students.

During the school board meeting, one student claimed nothing has been done to address the issues, but Superintendent Von Mansfield countered that assertion saying much had been done that students weren't aware of because of privacy issues.

Others addressed the board about resident LaShawn Littrice Davis being sent a letter by the district restricting her from campus. Administrators said she was on campus marching with students and encouraging their actions.

Administrators said they are listening to students and recognize that the sexual harassment and assault policies outlined in the parent-student handbook could be clearer.



Eric Crump/H-F Chronicle  
Homewood-Flossmoor High School students Titilayo Anoma, left, and Trinity Bond hold a sign that says "Break the chain" during a walkout to protest what they see as inaction on the part of administrators to allegations of student-to-student sexual assault.

Jodi Bryant, director of public relations and human resources, said a committee is meeting with students to help them "set goals" on what they want to achieve from their walkout. She said students also are offering feedback on how to

better explain the policies and share that information with students and parents.

"We are committed to our students. If you have a concern, come and talk to us because what you want to say can't be said in a larger session," she said.

Bryant said the school can help students understand policies on sexual assault issues or where to seek help on the matter through meetings with social workers, counselors and school psychologists.

At the same time, state law directs school officials who learn of an alleged sexual assault to call police and the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services. School representatives continuing the conversation about the incident could have a negative impact on the police building a case against the alleged predator, she said.

After students spoke, several board members offered assurances that student concerns are being heard.

Member Michelle Hoereth said she wanted students to recognize H-F as a safe space in which they can raise their voices. While the board couldn't offer much in the way of comment on the issue, Hoereth stressed, "We aren't just sitting idle."



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