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Corrections

It is the policy of the Oshkosh Herald to correct all errors of fact. For correction information, call 920-385-4512.

About the newspaper

Published weekly and mailed free of charge Tuesdays for Wednesday delivery (may vary based on U.S. Postal Service and holidays) to more than 31,000 homes and businesses in the Oshkosh area.

Oshkosh Herald LLC,
36 Broad St., Suite 300, Oshkosh.
An E-edition of the newspaper can be accessed at
www.oshkoshherald.com.

Gender ID instruction clarified in district

By Kaitlyn Scoville
OSHKOSH HERALD

Following recent backlash from parents in other school districts in the state regarding teaching elementary-age students about gender identity, the Oshkosh Area School District informed the community that its curricula have not changed.

Earlier in August, a group of parents approached Superior School District administration with arguments that a lesson plan within its human growth and development curriculum – which touches base on gender identity – wasn't appropriate for fifth-grade students, according to a Wisconsin Public Radio report.

A majority of people who spoke at the Superior board of education meeting were in support of the curriculum in place, while some continued to contend it wasn't age appropriate.

Objecting parents approached the situation by contending that the district's videos and a slideshow "persuades stu-

dents into a belief about gender identity that hasn't been scientifically proven," the WPR article reads.

Later last month, the school board decided to uphold the decision to teach gender identity in its fifth-grade human growth and development class. Similar events have arisen in Wauwatosa, influencing change in its human growth and development curriculum for the first time in over a decade.

The WPR article attributed these latest pushbacks to a wider nationwide effort to remove teaching about gender and identity in the classroom that has been intended to broaden inclusivity.

Oshkosh director of school curriculum and assessment Julie Conrad said the district is not teaching gender identity in its human growth and development courses and has not made changes to its curricula on this topic.

Last October, however, the Board of Education approved a change in administrative guidelines that allowed staff to use a student's preferred name and pronouns without parent's consent. District officials at the time told parents it was aimed at offering students a supportive learning environment that will allow staff to better support them in their conversations with their parents.

"Staff have been unable to support students in this regard and this change allows them to better support students in their conversations with their parents," a statement from the OASD in October read.

"The previous guideline also had the potential of creating a situation where

district staff were the ones informing a parent/guardian that their child was transgender or gender nonconforming. We found this approach damaged the relationships our students need to have with our staff and hampered our students' ability to own their truth and advocate for themselves."

Conrad said the district's Human Growth and Development Advisory Committee reviews its curriculum and last met in December.

Parents and guardians receive detailed information – including access to the lesson plans and materials – before the human growth and development curriculum is being taught to students in grades four and five.

At that point, parents and guardians are able to withdraw their student from the class if they wish to provide that information in the privacy of their own home.

In addition, students in seventh grade are taught the definitions of LGBTQ+ as part of their focus on diversity awareness and bullying prevention.

"As a district, we are committed to providing a safe, inclusive, nondiscriminatory learning environment for all students," Conrad said. "We are focused on ensuring that our schools are places where everyone feels welcome and supported and can thrive."

Families and residents can reach out to school and district leaders, Conrad added, per district Policy 9130. Administration and staff contact information can be found at oshkosh.k12.wi.us.

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