

Pullman School District to review policy after Obama speech concerns

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QUICKREAD

-WHAT HAPPENED: Pullman School District decided to review a policy that prevented students from watching Obama's live speech.

-WHAT IT MEANS: The district's policy committee will review the policy.

-WHAT HAPPENS NEXT: The board will meet with teachers and hear recommendations from the superintendent.

-WHY YOU SHOULD CARE: Many parents complained about their children not having the opportunity to watch the speech.

As a result of complaints, the Pullman School District will review the policy that prevented district officials from showing President Barack Obama's live speech to students last month.

Superintendent Paul Sturm gave teachers the option to let their students view the speech, but they had to follow the district's policy and administrative procedures regarding supplemental materials. The district's policy states materials that aren't part of the district's curriculum should be reviewed by teachers before they are presented to students in class - essentially making it impossible to show the live speech.

The Pullman School Board discussed the policy during its Wednesday night meeting at the request of board member Jim Evermann.

Evermann said he received a number of complaints.

"I have received some calls and e-mails from concerns from constituents, particularly parents, regarding the district's decision not to show the live speech ..." he said.

He said a review of the policy might be the best way to address the issue.

"A review of a policy every now and then is something good to do, (and) this is a good reason," he said.

Board President Dean Kinzer said everything that is presented in class to students should be reviewed first.

"I just feel that our policy protects our students from any lessons that may come into the classroom uncensored in any shape or form," he said.

Board member Susan Weed said she thought "the biggest issue was that (the speech) was for every (student)."

"Students in K-6 are not going to understand everything," she said.

Board member Jeff Sellen said he would like a few teachers to attend the next board meeting and express how they felt about the situation.

Sellen said the board should decide how district officials will deal with similar situations in the future.

"What kind of policy do we create to make that possible?" he asked.

Evermann said the policy needs to have more clarity and provide more guidance to teachers.

Sturm said he has discussed the issue with a couple of high school social studies teachers, also at their request to review the implications of the policy and procedures.

He said district officials found themselves in a difficult situation because of the "political fog" surrounding the speech and not knowing the context of it.

"I do think that it was an unfortunate situation that we found ourselves in," he said.

Sturm said he would take the board's discussion as an affirmation to move ahead with a review of the policy. The district's Policy Committee will review the policy, and Sturm will provide recommendations to the board at a later time.

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