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Mom can't find much to cheer about

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By Kerri Sandaine of the Tribune

She says her son faces discrimination for trying to play an active role on Garfield-Palouse cheerleading squad



Gar-Pal cheerleader Ben Grundy, along with the rest of the squad, do a cheer during a girls&#amp;#x2026;



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GARFIELD - Ben Grundy wants to be treated like everyone else on the cheerleading squad.

Instead, the 17-year-old senior at Garfield-Palouse High School says he's been treated differently because he's the only boy on the team.

"I want to perform in dance routines and do all the things the girls do," Ben says. "As the season went on, I was reduced to standing there. I could only move my arms."

The school responded to his concerns by allowing him to participate in a recent dance routine and giving him a set of pom poms. He is cheerleading at varsity basketball games.

But his mother, Suzanne Grundy, isn't satisfied.

She has raised the discrimination issue, alleging school officials initially tried to talk her son into being a mascot and treated him unfairly by not letting him participate fully in all of the activities performed by the cheer squad. She has sent letters to school board members, numerous elected officials and the media, and she says she's not going to stop until someone pays attention.

Grundy wants apologies from the school and a harassment and discrimination seminar conducted for adults and students to bring awareness to the community about these issues.

"This is not going to be swept under the carpet and go away," she says. "Forget that he's biracial. Forget that he's gay. He's a boy who wants to be a cheerleader, and that alone in rural eastern Washington is enough to cause problems because here men are men and girls are girls."

To protect the privacy rights of the student, the school district can't comment on any specifics, says Palouse Superintendent Bev Fox. "The policy of the district is not to discriminate against any student for any reason. If we do have a complaint or a concern, we will investigate it thoroughly and as quickly as possible."

Grundy, 47, a single mother of two sons, wants the district to acknowledge the situation hasn't been handled properly. She says she's glad the school has made some changes, including allowing Ben to do the same things as the girls, but it's not enough.

"They don't even know they're discriminating," she says. "That's why they need a seminar. While I'm glad for the changes, this shines a bright light on absence of these things before I sent a letter."

Originally from Southern California, the Grundys have lived in Whitman County for about three years, moving from Farmington to Garfield in May. Grundy's older son is in the military, Ben goes to high school in nearby Palouse, and she is on disability.

Grundy says she moved here for "a relationship that no longer exists and good schools." She says she loves living in the small, farming community and the friendships she's developed.

For the most part, she's been happy with how Ben has been treated. Her son is biracial, gay and suffers from Asperger's syndrome, which is an autism spectrum disorder, and also attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, Grundy says.

"Up until this, it's been fine. The kids pretty much accepted Ben for who he is. The problems started when he signed up to be a basketball cheerleader. He wants to be a cheerleader. He doesn't want to stand there and clap."

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