

Welcome to this generations chosen method of self expression, self advocacy, and mass protest. In our “MySpace” world this is the way to bring out issues and concerns.

I am Kathleen Duncan, I am Nathan Moorhead’s mother and this is my follow up to my sons email. I am proud of my son; his concern for his fellow students, his self-advocacy skills and his wiliness to share his experiences in hopes that others will listen and step up to his unspoken challenge to change. All of you who received his email are in some way connected to Harlem High School but not all of you may have understood what he meant, what the underlining issues is and how each of you can help. I hope to clarify what my teenage son means to convey to those of you who may not have understood completely what your inclusion in his email meant, one adult to another.

On one level this issue is a teacher’s unprofessional reaction and treatment of my son. On this level it is a personal undertaking between our family and this teacher to resolve the problem. My only acceptable resolution is removing my son from the hostile learning environment of her classroom. We are still waiting for her apology but at least I have been assured my son will not have to endure her hostility any longer. What all of you do not know is that this was really the last act our family has tolerated from this teacher. There has been numerous times so far this year that this teacher has acted unprofessional in her speech, manner and actions towards the students in her classroom. My son came home almost from the first day of school, appalled by this teacher’s manner of speaking to the students. I asked my son to do his best to work within his classroom setting and see if things changed but to document issues/outburst that concerned him. He has a collection of incidents documented, including written statements from other students. When I discussed this with the principal as being the LAST incident I wish to have my son experience with this teacher; one of his responses was that he hadn’t heard complaints about this teacher before. This leads me to my next level on this issue: Are we sure other students aren’t feeling that this teacher disrespects them, speaks, acts or in her mannerisms belittles them?

My son has written statements from other students in this class proving that this is not the case. On this level my concern is, “Are we teaching the students how to self advocate? Protest treatment they feel is wrong? Or does the principals lack of awareness of problem just show that the students don’t bring their issues forward? If it is a case of students not bring their feelings forward, shouldn’t we be asking, WHY?”

Ask yourself as an adult do you have to tolerate working with people who belittle you, harass you or make your working environment hostile or uncomfortable? No, not really. In the working world there are organizations to support the worker and the working environment. You, as an adult have choices: Tolerate it, report it or leave. What choices do the students at Harlem High School feel they have. Notice I said FEEL, not what is written in some handbook but what do they feel they can do. Have you taught the students how to bring issues forward? DO the students have voices and choices in how they are treated? Are they capable of self advocacy?

Nathan wanted to share his experience with you to let you know how he was feeling about this incident. He hopes that all of you will choose to act professional as you interact with students, realize that one student’s voice may represent more than one, it may represent many who don’t know how to bring out issues. He and I also hope that you will use your professional positions wisely, understanding the impact of your actions and reactions have on the students. I hope you, this school district and parents everywhere work together to give our students voices and choices. Teach self advocacy: “If you are not part of the solution, you are part of the problem”. (Eldridge Cleaver)