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The Boston Globe

S. Hadley School Committee head steps down

By Matt Rocheleau
Globe Correspondent / April 15, 2010

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SOUTH HADLEY — Nine days after being reelected, the South Hadley School Committee chairman — entrenched in criticism over officials' handling of bullying that preceded a high school student's suicide — announced last night he is stepping down from the post.

Edward J. Boisselle, who has served on the board for the past 10 years, including the last year as chairman, was quick to distance the move from being related to the ongoing controversy raised when prosecutors recently said some high school staff knew 15-year-old Phoebe Prince was being harassed by classmates, but did not take action to stop it.

Instead, Boisselle said at last night's school board meeting that his action was being taken because, "I've always felt that the chairmanship should rotate every year."

Boisselle will remain on the School Committee.

A split, standing-room-only crowd of local residents addressed school officials last night, expressing both anger and support toward the administrators during a meeting that saw multiple outbursts, including by the first two speakers, who were removed by police at Boisselle's request.

He said they were kicked out because they "talked about things that should not be talked about in public."

One of those speakers indicated officials should be hanged, and the other person was forced to leave because the chairman felt he was beginning to get into Prince's personal life.

"The School Committee is coming off looking deplorable," said a resident and high school parent, Barrie E. Chambers-Leonard. "I wish everyone had the chance to say what they felt today."

School officials said they have yet to meet with Northwestern District Attorney Elizabeth D. Scheibel to further discuss the details prosecutors uncovered in their investigation into Prince's death.

But, said Boiselle, they hope to soon.


"I take responsibility that we have not gotten together earlier after the actions of the Northwestern district attorney's office," said Boisselle, who relinquished his chairmanship to vice chairwoman JoAnn Jordan.

More than 100 people were packed into the same library prosecutors say Prince was harassed in by classmates hours before she hanged herself on Jan. 14.

In relation to bullying both online and in person, six teenagers are facing criminal charges brought forth by Scheibel's office about a 1/2 weeks ago for

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criminal charges brought forth by Scheiber's office about 2 1/2 weeks ago, for allegedly having played a role in the bullying of Prince.

In the week before she took her life, Prince, a new student who moved to South Hadley from Ireland last summer, endured a string of bullying incidents at the hands of classmates that ranged from vicious name-calling to taunting and threats of physical violence, according to court documents filed last week. ■

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