

BoEE gets complaints from Linn-Mar families

Written by Jim Ecker

Thursday, 03 March 2016 15:22 -



The Iowa Board of Educational Examiners (BoEE) has received official complaints from Linn-Mar families about the Linn-Mar football and weightlifting programs, according to one of the parents involved.

Bob Jordan, one of the leaders of the Concerned Parents Group, said he spoke with Kim Cunningham, the board secretary, on Monday to review the documents and discuss the situation.

Jordan said additional documents will be sent to the BoEE in the next few days.

The BoEE staff will review the complaints and decide whether to accept or reject the case, according to the BoEE complaint resolution process. If the case is accepted, an investigator will be assigned to begin an official probe.

The Linn-Mar parents have filed complaints against assistant football coach Matt Casebolt, head football coach Bob Forsyth, athletic director Scott Mahmens and principal Jeff Gustason. Five families have filed formal complaints with the BoEE, but at least 20 families have all shared similar concerns.

The families claim their sons have suffered verbal, mental, emotional and/or physical abuse. They have cited Casebolt in many of the complaints, but also hold Forsyth, Mahmens and Gustason responsible for not taking effective action to end the alleged problems.

The Linn-Mar school district conducted an in-house investigation and dismissed all of the complaints due to "insufficient evidence," as stated in letters from Gustason to the families. The families maintain the investigation was tainted, because two of the accused - Mahmens and Gustason - helped lead the investigation.

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The Linn-Mar Board of Education has declared its total support of the administration and the investigation, as expressed by board president Tim Isenberg. The school board does not plan to take any action in the matter.

The Iowa Board of Educational Examiners has a Code of Professional Conduct and Ethics Policy that governs proper conduct by licensed coaches, teachers and administrators. Based on the complaints by the Linn-Mar families, some of the possible ethics violations include the following:

- + Committing any act of physical abuse of a student.
- + Failing to report any suspected act of child abuse as required by state law.
- + Failing to make reasonable effort to protect the health and safety of students.
- + Conducting professional business in such a way that the practitioner repeatedly exposes students to unnecessary embarrassment or disparagement.

One of the Linn-Mar families has accused Casebolt of slamming a 45-pound weight into their son's face, causing a chipped tooth and bloody mouth.

Another family has accused Casebolt of making an athlete pick up broken glass with his bare hands, resulting in a cut hand and blood.

Another family has accused Linn-Mar officials of taking at least three hours to notify them that their son may have suffered a head injury during a supervised drill, rather than merely suffering from dehydration as first suggested. The athlete was ultimately diagnosed with a concussion.

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Another family has accused Casebolt of calling their son a "show queer" because he participated in football and show choir. The student was diagnosed with depression and hospitalized as a result of the taunting, the family maintains.

Another family has accused the football coaches of harassing their son at a football camp.

The BoEE will consider all alleged incidents that have occurred in the last three years. The one family's complaint that their son was called a "show queer" happened five years ago, but the Concerned Parents Group has included the complaint because they say it fits a pattern of verbal abuse and taunting that continues.

Iowa Code 272 requires all complaints to be resolved within 180 days, unless there is "good cause" for an extension.

If the BoEE proceeds with the case, its decisions would be presented at a public hearing before an administrative law judge. Some of the possible results are reprimand, suspension or revocation of license.

The BoEE has the power of subpoena.