1994-Mar-15 [Deseret News] Board Suspends Principal in Alabama Over Racial Talk

BOARD SUSPENDS PRINCIPAL IN ALABAMA OVER RACIAL TALK

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By Associated Press

The high school prom is on, and the principal who talked of banning interracial couples is out, at least for now.

Hulond Humphries was suspended Monday by the Randolph County School Board while it investigates complaints he told a mixed-race student she was a "mistake" and said there would be no prom if blacks and whites showed up as dates.About 500 people jammed the Randolph County High School auditorium amid heavy security for the hearing. Civil-rights leaders spoke on behalf of the mixed-race student, ReVonda Bowen.

Humphries' supporters said his comments were misinterpreted and were a result of his frustration with racially motivated fights at the 680-student school, which is 62 percent white and 38 percent black.

Four white school-board members and the only black member voted to suspend Humphries with pay pending an investigation. The board's two other white members dissented. It was not known how long the investigation would take.

Neither Humphries, who is white, nor Bowen attended the hearing. Humphries had no comment, his wife said early Tuesday.

Many blacks at the hearing said the episode was just the latest in a long history of biased acts by Humphries.

A 1989 review by the U.S. Department of Education criticized Humphries for encouraging black and white students to ride separate buses. It also charged that Humphries disciplined blacks more frequently and more harshly than whites.

"They should have gotten rid of him a long time ago," said City Councilman John Bailey, who is black. "Blacks are not going to give in. This stuff has been going on for 20 years."

The Rev. Joseph Lowery of Atlanta, president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, was cheered by the black contingent when he said principals "are not charged with dictating the private lives of individuals."

"Our school must set examples," Lowery said. "We've got to get along in this country."

The high school was closed Tuesday after a bomb scare Monday at the middle school in this rural east-central Alabama county of 20,000.

Humphries, 55, who has been principal for 25 years, told juniors and seniors at a Feb. 24 assembly that the prom in April might be canceled if mixed-race couples showed up.

Bowen, president of the junior class, has a white father and a black mother. She said she asked Humphries, "Who am I supposed to take to the prom?"

She said he responded: "That's just it. Your mom and dad made a mistake having you as a mixed child."

She burst into tears at the remark. Some students said Humphries tried without success to explain himself and apologize in the uproar that followed.

View Comments

As word of his comments reached parents and school officials, Humphries met with students the next day and said the prom was on but did not mention his racial remarks. He has not commented on them since.

Tawanna Mize, a senior who has an Indian father and white mother, said some students had taken Humphries' remarks out of context. She said he was trying to get students to discuss interracial dating. When Ms. Bowen began to cry, no one listened to the rest of his comments, she said.

"He said, `Wait a minute. That is not what I meant,"' she said. "He was trying to apologize and nobody would listen."

Many supporters had rallied to Humphries' defense earlier.