

Grand Island to review dress code after flap over NRA shirt

By [Barbara O'Brien](#) | News Staff Reporter | on April 24, 2014 - 12:37 PM

Life at Grand Island High School is getting back to normal, after a lesson on freedom of expression and school rules led the district to re-examine its dress code.

Sophomore Shane Kinney probably didn't know he was igniting a fire storm last month when he declined to wear his T-shirt inside out after a teacher found it objectionable. The blue shirt depicts the National Rifle Association logo over two crossed rifles, with the words "2nd Amendment shall not be infringed."

"It's a shirt he's worn before," said Shane's father, Wayne Kinney. Kinney and his wife, Kim, who works for the district, and their two sons are members of the NRA.

But this time, Shane was told to turn the shirt inside out, and he refused. Because he refused the request, he was given a one-day in-school suspension for insubordination, his father said.

And that's when the story captured attention outside Grand Island.

Superintendent Theresa Lawrence said the district's dress code sets out guidelines for student behavior and dress as well as the district's need for an orderly environment.

But the issue with Shane prompted the district to "review and reflect" on its practices and its response to infractions to the code.

"After review, consultation with legal counsel and authorities on the matter, we recognize we were wrong in our response to a perceived violation of our dress code and the response has been corrected," she told residents at a School Board meeting Tuesday.

The district has had a long-standing practice of prohibiting clothing depicting weapons or drug paraphernalia, she said. Students are asked to turn the clothing inside out, change it or remove it.

The district is dealing with an environment that includes lawful activities involving firearms as well as school shootings. Grand Island is a community where hunting is common, and research shows 61 percent of households have at least one registered weapon, Lawrence said.

The district removed the suspension from Shane's record, Kinney said.

Kinney attended the School Board meeting this week, and gives the superintendent praise for her statement.

"It was pretty good," he said, but he added, "There was no apology in there."

Lawrence said she has read every letter and email and listened to every voicemail left at the district. Some have questioned her commitment to the Constitution and her allegiance to the country. She pointed out her daughter is a varsity rifle shooter who recently represented Section VI in state competition and is seeking admittance into a U.S. military academy, her partner is an avid hunter and gun owner and her father served in the Armed Forces for 25 years.

She said the district is embracing the task of coming up with a dress code that focuses on the safety of children and staff, upholds constitutional rights and meets community standards.

“This dress code needs to be clear and widely understood with enforceable policies and procedures,” she said.

Reaction among students to the issue was mixed, Kinney said. He said the district realized it made a mistake by suspending his son, and he’s not sure the policy would have been changed if the issue had not gone nationwide.

Still, he said, “We’ve kind of moved on.”