

Opinion: South Lake Tahoe education officials need lesson about the impact of words

By Kathryn Reed

Tolerance and teaching differences is part of what our educational institutions are supposed to be about. Lake Tahoe Unified School District and Lake Tahoe Community College get an F this week for having done the opposite.

Both institutions were called on the carpet by *Lake Tahoe News* and neither responded.

LTUSD's moral and ethical breach was more egregious because of how it was handled, the age group impacted and audience receiving the information.

Angie Keil, secretary to Superintendent Jim Tarwater and de facto public information officer, regularly sends out emails to the district and anyone in the community asking to be on the list.

Her last email came out Sept. 5. In it she included an item state Sen. Ted Gaines, R-Granite Bay, had sent to constituents on Sept. 3. That item was about the bill signed by Gov. Jerry Brown last month that allows transgender students to choose which bathroom and locker room they want to use and which sports team to play on based on their gender identity.

Gaines wrote in his newsletter, "To my shock and that of many of my constituents, Governor Brown signed Assembly Bill 1266 into law last month, effectively making California school bathrooms, locker rooms and other, previously single-sex areas

into co-ed [stet] facilities.”

Keil in her email sent out all of Gaines’ opinion on this subject. But she also added her own emphasis. She made the words I underlined a larger point size. This is the first mention of the bill by Keil in one of her mass emails.

This is the email *LTN* sent to Keil on Sept. 5 that was copied to Tarwater, the five school board members and the principals at South Tahoe High and South Tahoe Middle schools:

Angie,

I was surprised and disturbed when you reprinted Ted Gaines rant from his newsletter about the transgender bathroom issue at schools. And even more alarmed when there was no context to it. As in, is there an issue at any of the schools here with transgenders, what is being done to help these youngsters to feel safe, and others to understand the rights of all?

It came across as though you were making a judgment call. A negative judgment.

And your email not only goes to all LTUSD employees, but many community members.

I found this inappropriate and unprofessional and hurtful to a segment of the community that is already marginalized. I also found it to be politically charged.

Perhaps someone could tell me how LTUSD is going to deal with this law? Is there an issue? What kind of education do kids get about transgender?

I’ve cc’d Ivone and Beth here with the belief they would be the principals with the greatest impact.

Kae

No one has responded.

But that does not mean I am alone in my feelings and beliefs about her email.

Here are comments from teachers and classified staff, who fear retribution and do not want their names used.

- I'm disgusted that she is writing this as a representation of how our district views this law ... given her role as the voice of the district in these newsletters.

- Very unsafe way to present this obviously sensitive Assembly bill.

- She always includes her own opinion and gets away with it.

- Out of line. She clearly has a personal agenda.

- Does she read her own district's rules about editorializing and sending out personal emails?

- We get threatened with write-ups if we so much as offer a couch to someone to use in his or her classroom. And she can write this?

- The opinion piece treats this as if everyone will be rushing the bathrooms and pretending to be transgender. That is ignorant and diminishes the fact that these are real people who are not faking it.

There is a transgender teen at South Tahoe High School who is out. *Lake Tahoe News* was told she was looking forward to this school year to be able to use the rest room facilities she felt most comfortable with.

At LTCC the issue also involves what the PIO emailed.

Peter Bostic on Sept. 3 sent a press release to the media about the new Conversational Russian I class being offered this fall.

The email talks about how the class will delve into current affairs in Russia.

(When I took a basic French class at LTCC the curriculum was not political in nature, but instead about helping us learn the language with some basics to help us get by if we were to visit France.)

The press release said, "As any news junkie knows, Russia is making headlines lately for banning homosexual behavior, for granting asylum to Edward Snowden (the government contractor who leaked information about the National Security Agency's surveillance programs), and for the strained diplomatic relationship between the United States and Russia."

This is the email I sent to Bostic and President Kindred Murillo:

I was a bit taken aback by the phrase "banning homosexual behavior" in the press release. It reminds me when people say the "gay lifestyle" – I'm still trying to figure out what that means. Maybe you could define heterosexual and homosexual behaviors for me.

No word from either of them.

The press release then quotes adjunct faculty member Maria Mircheva saying, "How and why these measures are working is worth a more careful cultural analysis. It is easy to label things as wrong and people as 'bad' without understanding their perspective." And then the press release says, "To help explain that perspective, Mircheva's class will host a number of guest speakers."

So, from that logic can one then surmise that if we understand why people discriminate, it's OK?

South Lake Tahoe has always been a little backward, but it's 2013 people. While it's perfectly fine to not like someone for

whatever reason, it is not OK to teach that hatred in our public institutions or keep people on staff who publicly advocate for discrimination.