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Jewish student sues N.J. school district after anti-Semitic bullying

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A Jewish woman filed a lawsuit against her former New Jersey school district Wednesday after she said officials failed to protect her from “endemic anti-Semitism.”

Students at the Marine Academy of Science and Technology drew swastikas in notebooks and read “Mein Kampf” in public, according to the lawsuit. One posed for a photograph next to the words, “I h8 Jews.” After her parents complained, the woman became “a pariah,” the complaint said, while school leaders were “deliberately indifferent” to her plight.

The state attorney general’s office previously found “reasonable suspicion” that the district overseeing the Sandy Hook school broke New Jersey’s anti-discrimination law.

The complaint named the Monmouth County Vocational School District, its board of education and school leaders in the U.S. District Court of New Jersey.

“I’m forever saddened that this happened to me, but I have grown to accept that my family and I did the right thing by reporting it,” the 18-year-old said in a message sent by her lawyer, Eric Hecker. He asked that the former student’s full name not be used to protect her privacy. She is no longer at the academy.

“I am trying to move forward but this will always be something I carry,” she said.

In a statement, District Superintendent Timothy McCorkell said the school had “appropriately disciplined” the students involved with the “I h8 Jews” photo.

Soon after that photo was taken, the school consulted with the Jewish Federation in the Heart of New Jersey. The South River-based nonprofit recommended curriculum about Jewish history and hate speech.

“Ongoing education” is crucial in situations like these, said Lisa Karasic, a spokesperson for the federation. “Both for students and educators.”

Many students at the academy were later enrolled in programs about the Holocaust and “cultural competency,” McCorkell said, in line with recommendations made by the state attorney general.

“The District is confident in the legal process and that the facts will support our position,” he said, referring to how the district responded to the original complaints.

He added that the school investigates every bias allegation and “is committed to providing a safe and inclusive learning environment for all students.”

The state’s investigation continues. In December, the head of the civil rights division, Rachel Apner, formally joined the complaint.

A spokesman for the state attorney general’s office said the district and investigators were talking, but he declined to comment further.