sunday, january 13, 2019 volume 48, no. 4 🚰 🐸 winonapost.com

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State pressures WAPS on school discipline

by CHRIS ROGERS

It is hard for students to learn if they are not in the classroom. That is the message then-commissioner of the Minnesota Department of Human Rights (DHR) Kevin Lindsey stressed with Winona Area Public Schools (WAPS) Superintendent Rich Dahman when Lindsey gave WAPS a choice: face potential charges of discrimination from the DHR or sign a collaboration agreement promising to take steps to improve.

The problem the DHR wants WAPS to improve is a major disparity in the rate of suspensions for students of color versus white students. In the 2017-2018 school year, WAPS suspended students from attending school 234 times, mostly for being disruptive or disorderly. Black students were suspended and sent away eight times more frequently than white students.

Other school districts across Minnesota also had significant racial disparities in student discipline, and last year, the DHR pressured numerous districts into similar collaboration agreements. "I heard from parents and guardians throughout the state that they were

concerned about suspension disparity," Lindsey explained. Particularly, they were concerned that students of color are suspended more often or more harshly for similar types of behavior, he explained.

"What kid is not talking to other kids in school? How do you kick him out for this?" one parent of an African-American WAPS student who was suspended asked. "You kick my baby out, you shorten his education," the parent

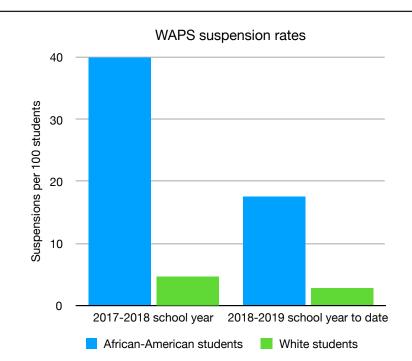
The DHR found that special education students were also being suspended at higher rates than other students.

As Dahman told the School Board

before it approved the agreement last May, "Winona Area Public Schools is one of 43 districts and charters across the state of Minnesota that have been identified as potentially discriminating against minority and disabled students based on suspension data from the 2015-16 school year."

"Studies have proven that higher rates of school suspensions and expulsions among students of color and students with disabilities can have lasting negative impacts in their lives and education," Lindsey stated. "That is why the Minnesota Department of Human Rights takes seriously any allegation or evidence that indicate disciplinary measures are falling disproportionately upon children of color and students with disabilities in our schools. It is our responsibility to fully review such allegations, and work with local school

see **DISCIPLINE** page 5a



New bands for MWMF's 10th year



Photo by Nathaniel Nelson

Winona dream pop band Sleeping Jesus performs at Ed's (no name) Bar during Mid West Music Fest 2018. They will be returning to the fest again later this year.

local CEO by CHRIS ROGERS After considering a merger with the

YMCA to

hire new,

La Crosse YMCA, the Winona Family YMCA Board has decided to maintain its independence and hire a new CEO to be the face of the Winona Y and usher its new facility to completion. "In a community of our size, the

members look for that and the business community looks for that," Winona YMCA Board member Vicki Decker said. "Who is the face of the Y? Well, it's the CEO, whoever he or she may

The Winona Y broke ground on its

new, \$14.5-million facility in partnership with Winona Health last fall and will begin construction in earnest this spring. Since the departure of the Winona Y's last CEO in 2017, La Crosse Area Family YMCA CEO Bill Soper has filled in as the interim head of the Winona Y, guiding the major building project, overseeing local staff, and spending around two days a week in Winona.

see **YMCA** page 3a

by NATHANIEL NELSON

It may only be January, but Mid West Music Fest (MWMF) is preparing for what may be its biggest

year yet. Last week, the festival announced the full lineup for its 10th anniversary music festival in Winona and La Crosse, Wis., and with it some new changes and surprises.

Recent favorites like The People Brothers Band, McNasty Brass Band and Pho are taking the year off, and instead, the lineup will be filled with new faces and new tunes. Of the 120

bands playing the festival, 74 are newcomers, including many of the headliners.

see **MWMF** page 5a

New WAPS Board talks leadership, finances

by NATHANIEL NELSON

During an at-times heated meeting on Thursday, the new Winona Area Public Schools (WAPS) Board debated its role as district leaders. By the end of the night, brand-new board member Nancy Denzer was elected board chair, two new members were sworn in, and the board debated whether board members should play a bigger role in finances as the district deals with serious budget problems.

During the board's organizational meeting, senior members Jeanne Nelson, Tina Lehnertz and Steve Schild were passed over for board chair in favor of Denzer. Lehnertz will retain her role as vice chair, while other newcomers Karl Sonneman and Michael Hanratty will serve as clerk and treasurer, respectively.

One of the biggest topics of the night was discussing board committee assignments, a typically mundane task done at the beginning of every

Sonneman argued that board members should be more involved with budgeting and called for the reinstatement of a district finance committee, which he said should include board members that work with administrators earlier in the budgeting process in order to be more involved with district finances. A similar finance committee was dissolved in 2013 after board members complained that it

see **FINANCES** page 4a

Former Ledebuhr's closed



Photo by Chris Rogers

In 2016, Steve Sula (left) and Tye Hemmelman made tripen, a traditional Luxembourg-American blood sausage.

Ledebuhr hopes to reopen

by CHRIS ROGERS

David and Karen Ledebuhr spent their careers building a business that became a local institution. Local livestock producers and hunters relied on Ledebuhr Meats' Goodview slaughterhouse to process their animals, the company's deli shops in Goodview and Winona were a lunchtime hot spot for locals, and for the area's European immigrant communities, it was one of the last places to buy traditional meats.

David Ledebuhr sold the business to Illinois-based IBR Group and retired in 2017. Then, at the end of last

see **LEDEBUHR** page 5a

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"One thing we heard a lot last year was that we were having a lot of the same bands," said MWMF Festival Director Parker Forsell. "We made a conscious choice to bring in new people who have never played the fest before."

In Winona, Minneapolis-natives Nooky Jones will bring their soul stylings back to town after their debut at Live at the Levee last year. Joining them will be Doomtree hip-hop artists Longshot and Lazerbeak, the latter of whom announced his new album on Tuesday; funk band Alex Rossi; and indie-synth act Graveyard Club, all of whom are making their MWMF debut. La Crosse will have new headliners as well, with honky-tonk rockers Banditos coming to the Midwest for the first time, along with indie rocker Ruby Boots and funk band Luthi.

Other staples will be making a return, Forsell added, but they might be a bit different than the last time around. Charlie Parr will be returning to headline one night at the Masonic Theater along with Black Eyed Snakes, and while both have played the fest before, this time around they'll be joining the stage with one

also highlighting women artists more, too. We tried to book as many as we could," Forsell added.

MWMF will be hosting a Women in Minnesota Music showcase at Burke Music House on Saturday, May 4, featuring performances by Annie Mack, Aby Wolf and Humbird. Forsell said bringing in more female artists was a big focus of booking this year's annual festival, with other popular acts such as the Gully Boys and Ruby Boots joining

"Another exciting thing is the Masonic," Parker added. The Masonic Temple Theater is currently undergoing renovations, but in May, the theater will be packed with people to experience the updated space with music to match.

This year also marks another big change for the fest — it will be taking place in May instead of April. "We've always had a lot of challenges with the weather, and last year in

1 Burger **\$5.00**

2 Burgers **\$9.00**

La Crosse was the last straw,"

In the past, MWMF has always been an April festival, with La Crosse usually hitting the second weekend and Winona kicking off two weeks later. In 2018, the La Crosse weekend landed on the last blizzard of the year, causing mass band cancellations and lower attendance as people decided to stay off the roads and away from the venues.

In response, Forsell said the MWMF board decided to push the festival into May. This way, it will be able to avoid any late-season flurries or frigid temps and land squarely in early summer weather. The Winona dates are set for May 3 and 4, while La Crosse will come second on May 17 and

The tent stage will also be changing this year, moving from the city lot on Second Street to Levee Park. According to Forsell, the tent stage has often shifted around, finding a home in the Eagles Club parking lot and outside the Boat House, but with Levee Park completed specifically to cater to large events, the choice was made to move again.

"[Levee Park] is just a much better spot, being right on the river. We're also going to have the same pop-up stage as Live at the Levee, so you'll have that backdrop of the bridges," Forsell said.

Even with all the announcements, there will still be plenty of surprises. Several nationally touring bands from Texas, Tennessee, and Pennsylvania will be taking a trip to the driftless region to play, and other local acts and venues have plans yet to be announced.

With 10 years in the bag and a new festival around the corner, Forsell said he is excited for people to experience what MWMF has planned for this year. "It stays so theoretical for a while, just numbers and names on a spreadsheet, but it's always fun to see real people reacting to music. People having those epiphanies at show is what it's all about," he

Early-bird tickets for the 10th anniversary Mid West Music Festival are available now for \$65, or \$35 for just one city. For more information and for a full lineup visit www. midwestmusicfest.org or call 507-494-8079.

Discipline

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officials to ensure equal treatment under the law for all kids."

Did bias cause the disparity?

Was WAPS treating students of color differently or were those students acting out more often? WAPS and state officials have not published information comparing why students of different races were suspended. However, Lindsey responded, "When systems operate with disparate outcomes and then the person involved in the system cannot really explain why these disparities are occurring, to us at the department, that's concerning." Based on complaints from parents, he added, "I felt that if I spent time going through all of the suspensions at their various schools and charters I would find evidence of discrimination." Lindsey said that rather than investigate every single complaint of discrimination, he felt it was more productive to try to get school districts to make broader systematic changes.

WAPS staff did not suspend students for no reason, Dahman stated. "They suspended them because they believe the actions the student took warranted time away from school," he said. Asked whether students of color were acting out more often or was WAPS treating them differently, Dahman said that WAPS' goal is to proactively teach students productive behaviors and try to nip discipline problems in the bud. "I think that other piece of your question," he added, referring to whether WAPS treats students of color differently, "is addressed by that cultural competency training and making sure we have the training to address those issues in a fair manner when they come up."

Cultural competency training for teachers and staff is one of the steps WAPS has vowed to take to improve its student discipline disparities. It focuses on being respectful and aware of cultural differences. The trainings sometimes discuss unconscious bias or implicit bias: subconscious feelings, assumptions, or stereotypes that people hold. Psychological studies report that unconscious bias may cause people to view African-American boys as dangerous, for example. Lindsey paraphrased the writer James Baldwin: "One of the issues with racism in America is thinking that it can be all around you and not impact you."

Does WAPS think the disparity is a problem?

The DHR was clear that the goal of the collaboration agreements is to reduce the racial and ability-based disparities in student discipline. Dahman has offered varying explanations of

what WAPS' goal is. Asked whether the racial disparities in student discipline is a problem, Dahman responded, "We would like to reduce suspensions for all students." Dahman also described the goal as reducing suspensions for all students when he presented the collaboration agreement to the School Board last May. "It's really keyed around reducing outof-school suspensions ... Obviously, we want to do everything we can to reduce the number of students that are being suspended from school."

The Post asked Dahman a second time whether the racial disparities, in particular, are a problem. He replied, "That's what we worked on — the number of suspensions - and to make sure that the rate of suspensions are in-line across our At other points, Dahman's

descriptions of the agreement's goal have been more consistent with the DHR. "It's a subject that districts across the state are dealing with - student discipline and how to handle that in a way that is equitable and also reduces the need to suspend students," he stated last May. At an August meeting, he said, "We want to make sure that our discipline procedures are solving discipline problems, that they're fair and equitable, and that they can be enforced consistently across the district."

What the agreement requires; what WAPS has done

The collaboration agreement and the strategic plan WAPS developed to meet the terms of the agreement — require WAPS to form committees to analyze suspension data and make recommendations for how to reduce disparities. It also requires WAPS officials to take part in a state-wide committee with the same goal. Conducting student and parent surveys on student discipline is also part of WAPS'

WAPS signed the collaboration agreement in May 2018 and provided its first report to the DHR in September 2018. Committees had met, policies had been reviewed, but WAPS was still working on conducting parent and student surveys and making recommendations for change, that report stated. At two meetings last year, the School Board discussed the issue for a total of 29 minutes. Eight months in, WAPS is currently preparing its second report to the DHR. The collaboration agreement expires in September 2021.

In an interview late last month, Dahman said that the local committees have met and that WAPS' staff have attended the state-wide meetings, but that recommendations for change are still forthcoming. "We have some things we're working on, but the formal recommendations will be part of the report that goes to the DHR in February," he stated.

WAPS Director of Learning and Teaching Maurella Cunningham said that the district would be sending surveys to all parents in the coming weeks first by email, then by mail, if necessary. In previous School Board meetings, WAPS officials indicated that these surveys would cover lots of different topics, not just student

discipline and race. agreement requires WAPS to continue analyzing its suspension data and report that data to the School Board and to the DHR. That data is supposed to be used as a metric to measure whether WAPS is reducing racial disparities in discipline. However, the data that WAPS is reporting to the School Board and the DHR and that WAPS has identified as its metric of success does not include racial demographics. It is simply the total number of suspensions broken down by the type of misbehavior that formed the basis for the suspension. It does not include any information on whether black students are still being suspended at eight times the rate of white students. "Does [the agreement] require

us to include demographic data with the students that have been disciplined?" School Board member Allison Quam asked Dahman. WAPS and DHR have information on suspensions by race and look at it, but it is not part of the required report, Dahman responded. The Post asked Dahman: How can WAPS tell if its reducing racial disparities when its metrics do not include race? "We look at those [numbers] internally, but that's not something the DHR had as part of our plan with them," he responded. The DHR did approve WAPS' plan for using suspension data - without any measure of racial disparities - as its metric for success.

Alternatives to suspension

Dahman said that WAPS is working on developing alternatives to suspension and strategies for student discipline that are more proactive and supportive and that do not make suspension a first resort. In a press release, DHR officials pointed to a St. Paul school that had success using a restorative justice model to reduce suspensions and improve behavior.

At last August's School Board meeting, board member Jeanne Nelson asked about in-school suspension (ISS). ISS still takes students out of classrooms, but it keeps them in school and, at least in theory, working on school work. "I'm wondering if we have adequate and appropriate space for in-school suspension even," Nelson said. In 2014, a Winona Post investigation found that the Winona Middle School (WMS) had cut staff used to monitor the ISS room. Instead, school staff were sending students to a room next door to administrative offices, but with no adult in the room. Since then, budget shortfalls have forced WAPS to make

Dahman told Nelson that WAPS now has a system to provide supervised ISS. "Obviously, anytime you're staffing [ISS], that's someone who is supervising students who isn't able to do other duties. So when there are students assigned to ISS, it's not an ideal situation staffing-wise, but both of our schools [the middle and high schools] have plans for how to handle that."

A parent of an African-American student who was given out-of-school suspension said that when they asked WAPS officials whether their child could receive in-school suspension instead, school staff responded, "I can't do that because we don't have enough staff."

The school resource officer's role

One item on the to-do list that WAPS has addressed is revising the job description for the school resource officer. The resource officer is a Winona Police Department officer whom WAPS pays to be on-duty full time at local schools — mostly the Winona Senior High School. The new job description clarifies that the resource officer should not get involved in student discipline. It is important to keep law enforcement and school discipline separate, Dahman said. The resource officer's job is to ensure safety and security, he stated. "The principal should be the person dealing with discipline, not the school resource officer ... Law enforcement shouldn't be part of that interaction. It's a school policy. If a student breaks a school policy, school teachers and staff handle that policy," he added.

Will disparities improve?

Student discipline data from the 2018-2019 school year will not be available from the Minnesota Department of Education until late this year. However, WAPS shared its statistics for this school year to date. According to that data, the suspension rate for all students has decreased sharply, falling from 7.5 suspensions for every 100 students to 3.9 suspensions.

There is still a significant racial disparity, with black students being suspended more than six times as often as white students, but the disparity shrank from a nearly 750-percent difference in 2017-2018 to a 525-percent difference so far this school year.

With the inauguration of Minnesota Governor Tim Walz, former DHR Commissioner Lindsey was replaced by Commissioner Rebecca Lucero last week, and the DHR was not immediately available for comment on whether WAPS' progress on the collaboration agreement has been satisfactory.

Asked last year whether he believed the collaboration agreement would in fact improve racial disparities in student discipline, Lindsey said, "While this sets forth motion to address and reduce suspension disparities, it should not be taken as the last word." Asked whether he had faith in WAPS, he responded, "I do. I think the fact that they were one of the first organizations, one of the first school districts, to sign off on the agreement — I think that does say something about their commitment." He added, "It takes a certain amount of leadership to [acknowledge the problem] in the public space and the public domain, and the fact that they're willing to do that does speak volumes of them. Will it be easy? Will it all happen in the next six months?

According to WAPS staff, a survey that includes questions about student discipline will soon be sent to all parents in the district, and the School Board will receive an updated report on the collaboration agreement next month.

Keep reading the Winona Post for more on this story. Please share your thoughts and experi-

ences with this issue. Chris@winonapost.com

port.

Nathaniel Nelson and Sarah Squires contributed to this re-

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Ledebuhr

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year, that company closed the meat processing plant and deli shops that once employed 18 people. The Ledebuhrs still own the Goodview building, which they were leasing to IBR Group, and David Ledebuhr said he hopes to find someone to reopen the business.

David Ledebuhr explained there were still many details up in the air. However, he said, "When all the dust settles, I hope I can sell it to someone

who will reopen it ... I don't plan on opening it up myself. I'm retired and I like retired life." He added, "It's going to have to be the right people, and I'm going to be a little bit more

diligent this time around." Representatives from IBR Group were not available for comment, but Goodview City Adminstator Dan Matejka confirmed the business closed at the end of last month. "Anytime a business leaves a community, it has an effect on the city, but I think in this case, it's even harder knowing that Ledebuhr's was a part of Goodview for many, many years," Matejka said. The meat processing plant had been in business since

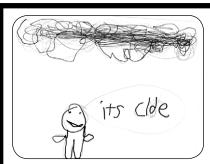
It is unclear what issues contributed to the closure. Asked about how many employees were laid off when the plant was shuttered, Matejka said he was not sure, adding that there had been turn over among staff. IBR Group was cited by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) for multiple cases of inhumanely slaughtering animals last year. On a few occasions, the slaughterhouse failed to properly knock animals unconscious before killing them and, in one instance, failed to

kill a conscious animal swiftly, according to USDA citations.

"I think this had to happen before it gets better," David Ledebuhr said of the closure. "The way it was going, it could not get any better. It was just run too far in the hole ... Now I'm going to have to start over from ground level," he explained.

'That's what I'm hoping, but I don't know what can happen," David Ledebuhr continued. "That's my dream — to reopen it as a slaughter plant. There was such a need for what we did," he added.

Chris@winonapost.com



VEATHER Forecast

SATURDAY Cloudy

High 33°

Low 23°

SUNDAY

High 35°

Low 26°

MONDAY Partly Cloudy

High 41°

Low 29°

TUESDAY Partly Cloudy

High 39° Low 21°

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