

District 214's moment of silence challenged by atheist activist

Arjun Puranik
News Editor

For some, prayers and church bells are casually integrated into everyday life. Others show devotion by physically hailing to their god.

But this is not the case with freshman Dawn Sherman from Buffalo Grove High School in neighboring District 214.

She and her father, atheist activist Rob Sherman, have shown concern for what they perceive as state support of religion by questioning the Illinois Silent Reflection and Student Prayer Act.

The Shermans sued District 214 because they say the law is unconstitutional.

"States cannot pick and choose which part of the Constitution [they follow]," Rob Sherman said.

Sherman says he sued because the state should not provide a special opportunity for prayer in school.

"The amended [moment of silence] law preserves the rights of students who want to pray," Sherman said. "This lawsuit seeks to restore balance between those who want to pray and those who want an education."

Fremd Principal Marina Scott first questioned the law's secularity.

"My initial response was that it was crossing the line of church and state," Scott said. "[But] it doesn't interfere with the educational process."

Junior Katie Bruno says the law does not support religion.

"There's nothing religious about asking for a moment without chaos," Bruno said.

Freshman John Reising agrees with Bruno.

"I know there is supposed to be a separation between church and state, but the moment of silence is a reflection time that is not necessarily for prayer," Reising said.

Scott says the potential problem lies in the possibility that the law encourages religion.

According to Sherman, the Illinois General Assembly



Logue photo by John Beyer

SHHHH! Silence is golden, but Rob Sherman questions its constitutionality with his lawsuit against District 214.

changed one word in a previous student prayer law, from "may" to "shall," essentially changing a voluntary public school moment of silence into a mandatory public school moment of silence. Governor Rod Blagojevich vetoed the bill, but the General Assembly overrode his veto to make the bill a law.

Sherman says the law provides two options for students during the moment of silence.

"Either pray or reflect on the anticipated activities of the day," Sherman said. "Children in early elementary school would have no clue what [the second option] means. The effect of the law is either pray or do nothing."

This two-option scenario is one of the major shortcomings of the Illinois law in contrast to Virginia's moment of silence law, which states that students may meditate, pray, or do anything else that will not disrupt others' abilities to do what they want, according to Sherman.

"[The Virginia law] is bad policy because it uses class time for personal business, but it is constitutional," Sherman said.

Sherman explained that he thinks the intent of the bill is to sneak prayer into high school, noting that some of the co-sponsors were Sen. James Meeks, who is also a pastor at Salem Baptist Church on the south side of Chicago; Sen. Jacqueline Collins, a minister at St. Sabina Roman Catholic Church on the south side; and Rep. LaShawn Ford, who is on the parish council and finance committee at St. Martin de Porres Roman Catholic Church on the west side.

"As Illinois' leading atheist, it's my job to make sure they don't get away with it," Sherman said.

Sherman says he has garnered support for his lawsuit because of indignation that the General Assembly would spend time getting prayer into the public education system but are not properly funding schools.

Reising says suing over the moment of silence was unnecessary.

"It's only a quarter of the time teachers give us at the end of class to pack up," Reising said. "And we take even longer preparing for class in the morning after the pledge anyway. It's not really a waste of time."

Arson disrupts boys locker room

Arianna Garcia
Staff Writer

The building was evacuated after school on Tuesday, Nov. 13, when a student set a fire in the boys' locker room, according to administrators.

At around 2:50 p.m., the fire was ignited by a sophomore boy after his eighth hour gym class.

Sophomore Brian Allen, who was in the locker room immediately before the locker was lit, says the student sprayed an Axe can on the door of a locker in order to ignite the flame.

"One kid was fighting with another kid and wanted to light his locker and its contents on fire, but he lit the wrong locker," Allen said.

Several male students and coaches were at the scene, but it was English teacher and basketball coach Jim Weaver who actually put out the blaze.

"I grabbed a Rubbermaid garbage can, filled it up in the shower stall, and doused the closed locker with water twice to get the fire out and a couple more times just to be sure," Weaver said.

No one was harmed during the incident, but the contents of the locker were destroyed. The fire alarms did go off and the fire department arrived immediately, creating a traffic back-up in the parking lot, according to police consultant Angela Bonneville.

"There was some commotion in the parking lot because it happened right as the buses were leaving," Bonneville said.

The fire delayed boys' basketball and other practices 15 minutes as well, according to Weaver.



Logue photo by John Beyer

LOCKER INFERNO. The fire in this locker set off the fire alarms and initiated an investigation.

After the fire was extinguished, the locker room was immediately locked down to allow the police to investigate, said Dean of Students Ruben Hinojosa, who is also a P.E. teacher.

"It was like arson, almost," Hinojosa said.

Bonneville explained that the student will be charged for criminal damages. However, the school's punishment for the student is still pending, according to Principal Marina Scott. Starting a fire is considered a gross misconduct that can lead to expulsion.

"Anything that causes a breach in safety for students, such as starting a fire, is considered an expellable offense," Scott said. "It's one you don't want to find yourself in the midst of."

Scott said it is important to educate students about how dangerous this is in order to prevent similar situations in the future.

Shooting spree in Omaha affects malls nationwide

Christine Chen
Managing Editor

When a teenage boy walked into Omaha Westroads Mall on Dec. 5, nothing was suspected of him—he was another teenage boy. However, instead of carrying a wallet in his pocket, he had an automatic rifle hidden in his sweatshirt, and instead of enjoying the typical holiday shopping spree, this boy went on a killing spree.

Nineteen-year-old Robert Hawkins walked into the Westroads Mall with the intention to kill because he "just snapped," according to his suicide note.

After Hawkins killed nine people and severely injured two people with his AK-47, he then turned the gun on himself. Due to this terrifying tragedy, both authorities and civilians are questioning public safety.

Malls across the nation are now tightening security, especially during the holiday season. The number of mall patrols have increased, and security is making a larger effort to work with local police.

The local Woodfield Mall is also taking precautions to deal with potential security breaches.

"Woodfield Mall has reinforced measures already put into place since 9/11 to heighten security," Woodfield Mall General Manager Mark Strich said. "We are prepared to undertake various security crises."

The Omaha shooting spree worries many people in the community, including those who do not regularly shop.

"I think the Omaha shooting reveals a really sad and disappointing part of soci-

ety. However, I don't think the shootings will affect me too much because I don't go shopping very much," junior Henry Shin said.

Safety concerns and the new security measures also are impacting regular shoppers.

"The shooting at Omaha makes me a little apprehensive to go shopping again because it makes me realize that bad things can happen anywhere, even at more high-end stores," junior Jenny Yoon said.

Junior Jennifer Norenberg says that dangerous people may be a threat at public places like Woodfield.

"The fact that someone can bring a gun and shoot people in the mall is scary because you never know who could be at the mall and what could happen," Norenberg said.

Parents of the community are also highly concerned for the safety of their children and are uncertain how far malls should go to ensure safety.

"Now I think malls are just other unsafe places for my child to go," said Jill Piccolino, whose daughter Jacque Piccolino attends Fremd. "Do we need to have metal detectors in malls now to be safe? It's frightening that we don't have as much freedom as we used to and that we need to be so aware of our surroundings."

But senior Dan Kendzior says the shooting was an isolated incident and doesn't think people should be worried.

"I know that the Omaha incident is not a frequent occurrence. I have bigger things to worry about than some lunatic in a shopping mall," Kendzior said.