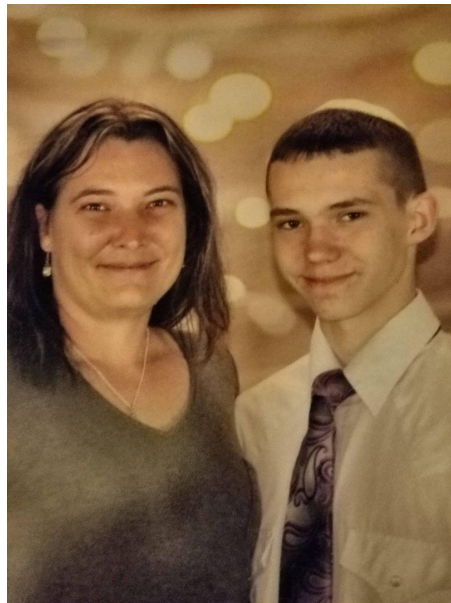

https://www.kctv5.com/news/mom-sues-cameron-school-district-after-she-says-they-failed/article_3cb4d3ca-2e07-11e9-a0c3-f76e7e283a93.html

Mom sues Cameron School District after she says they failed to protect son from bullying

Emily Sinovic

Posted Feb 11, 2019



Susan Welchel, left, believes if the school district had done its job, her son would be alive today.

(Submitted)

CAMERON, MO (KCTV) -- A mother is suing the Cameron School District after she says the district failed to protect her son from vicious bullying.

Susan Welchel believes if the school district had done its job, her son would be alive today.

She says instead of protecting her son, the school district punished him.

The lawsuit describes the school district's response to the bullying, "failure to protect and direct participation in discrimination, bullying, and harassment of Lane Welchel based on national origin and religion, which ultimately resulted in his suicide."

Bullied for being Jewish

During his eighth-grade year at Cameron Veterans Middle School, Lane began wearing a yarmulke and Star of David in observance of his Jewish faith and origin.

Welchel said this made her son a target for relentless bullying by other students.

"He told me some of the jokes that were being told to him when he finally told me he was being bullied," Welchel said.

Lane's mother says students told him, "Do you know the difference between a Jew and a pizza? Pizza doesn't scream when you put it in the oven."

Welchel says she first found out about students bullying her son in January of his eighth-grade year when Lane told his mother he didn't feel well and needed to see a doctor.

"I took him to the doctor and that's how I found all of this out," Welchel told KCTV5. "He was depressed. We had to put him in a facility due to the depression ... he had planned to kill himself."

Welchel says she went to the school asking for help protecting her son.

Instead of investigating, Welchel said she was told to fill out a bullying report form online and make sure to include specific names of each student bullying her son.

"I talked to the counselor first and she said, 'Well, give me names.' I said, I don't have names. Then she put her hands on her hips and said, 'There's nothing I can do for you.' Are you kidding me? Nothing you can do for me because I don't have names?" Welchel said. "Shortly after I talked to the principal, I did my own digging, contacted his friends ... trying to find out who was bullying him. Who are some of these children since they were so determined they had to have names."

She said even after filling out the form, listing names of students, the school didn't provide protection for Lane.



In April of Lane's eighth-grade year, swastikas were spray painted on school property.

(Submitted)

In April of Lane's eighth-grade year, swastikas were spray painted on school property.

Lane's mother says the school went after Lane, searched him based on a student's tip and then suspended Lane.

The school accused Lane of violating school policy because he had his allergy medications, over the counter pain relievers and anti-depressant medications in his backpack.

The school suspended Lane and reported him to police.

Shortly after, Lane was in the hospital again, having suicidal thoughts. Even then, Welchel said the school showed no empathy or interest in Lane's health.

“When he went into the second facility the principal called me. She wanted to call the facility to talk to Lane about the graffiti. Are you kidding me?” Welchel told KCTV5.

Welchel said Lane wasn't allowed back at school until school administrators could question him about the graffiti. Lane eventually was able to meet with school officials and his mother says he was cleared of any wrongdoing and allowed to start his freshman year. His mother says the bullying continued.

In December of his freshman year, Lane took his own life.

Lawsuit

“You don't as a mom you don't want to believe. You think they're still going to be there when you get home. No, not my child, not my child. It was my child,” Welchel said.

Attorney Chris Dove is representing Welchel in her lawsuit against the Cameron School District.

“It was an absolute tragedy, and the thing of it is, it was a slow motion tragedy. It was entirely preventable,” Dove told KCTV5.

Dove says the school district failed Lane and could have prevented his death.

“They didn't take the bullying and harassment of a Jewish kid seriously. I think if the bullying and victim had been reversed in certain ways ... it would be different if the victim was being bullied because they were Catholic and wearing a cross ... it would've been handled quickly,” Dove said.

The lawsuit accused the school district to failing to follow its own policies including policies that mandate taking immediate action to protect the alleged victim, notifying the victim he is protected from retaliation, initiating an investigation, initiated by the principal, within two days of the bullying report, completing that investigation within 10 days and disciplining students who were participating in the bullying.

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UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
WESTERN DISTRICT OF MISSOURI

SUSAN WELCHEL, individually, and as)
personal representative of the ESTATE)
OF LANE GREY WELCHEL)

Plaintiffs,)

Case No.:

v.)

CAMERON R-1 SCHOOL DISTRICT)

Serve:)

c/o Dr. Matt Robinson)

423 N. Chestnut)

Cameron, MO 64429)

BOARD OF EDUCATION OF)
CAMERON R-1 SCHOOL DISTRICT)

Serve:)

c/o Dr. Matt Robinson)

423 N. Chestnut)

Cameron, MO 64429)

DR. MATT ROBINSON)

Serve:)

423 N. Chestnut)

Cameron, MO 64429)

TIFFANI COLLINS)

Serve:)

Cameron Veterans Middle School)

1015 South Park)

Cameron, MO 64429)

Defendants.)

COMPLAINT

COMES NOW Plaintiffs Susan Welchel, individually, and as personal representative of the Estate of Lane Grey Welchel state and allege as follows for their Complaint against Defendants Cameron R-1 School District, Board of Education of Cameron R-1 School District, Dr. Matt Robinson, and Tiffani Collins:

Welchel says those things never happened.

“I wanted help. Help me stop this so my child feels safe at school. That’s all wanted,” she said.

Welchel wants the school district to take responsibility and change before another student is affected.

“Kids don’t quit bullying because my son’s not here. They move on, because that’s what they’ll do. That’s all that happens,” Welchel said.

Cameron School District response

In response to KCTV5’s request for an interview or comment, Cameron School District Superintendent, Dr. Matt Robinson, emailed the following statement:

“ Out of respect for the privacy of our families and in accordance with state and federal law, the Cameron R-1 School District does not publicly comment about specific student matters, including pending litigation.

As demonstrated by our Board policies and practice, however, the Cameron R-1 School District is steadfastly committed to creating an inclusive culture that reflects the diverse community around us. We work hard to hear, appreciate, and respect the thoughts and ideas of all of our students, families, and staff. As part of this commitment, the District strives to provide an educational environment that is free from bullying, discrimination, and harassment. The administration takes seriously allegations of bullying, discrimination, and harassment and promptly investigates complaints in compliance with our policies.

The unexpected death of a young person is a devastating and tragic moment for a school community. Our hearts and prayers remain with the Welchel family members and friends as they continue to grieve.
-Superintendent, Dr. Matt Robinson ”

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Investigative Reporter