



MORGAN HILL UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

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Press Conference – May 7, 2010; 11:45 a.m.

Dr. Wesley Smith, Superintendent

It's important to understand that this was never about whether students were allowed to wear patriotic clothing on our campuses. They can. It was about ensuring that our high school campus was orderly and safe. School leaders have to make judgment calls on when to take preventative measures to preempt a possible incident or conflict. In this situation, it appears that a decision was made too quickly. Today, the principal of Live Oak has issued an apology to the students, parents, staff and community for the decision that was made.

This has certainly been a very difficult time for our school district. But we are very proud of our students and staff in the way they have responded and handled this high profile experience. We have a lot of positive things going on at our school. Yesterday students took the AP English exam and believe they did quite well. Today many are taking the AP U.S. History exam and tomorrow they are holding a senior prom. This situation has certainly been a test for our school and by all accounts our students have been passing that test with flying colors.

It is unfortunate that some people want to leverage their personal agendas off of this incident. The district has been inundated by people from across the country, who have wanted to convert this into a political statement. While the media coverage of this situation has for the most part been even-handed, the bloggers, talk shows, social networks and self-proclaimed experts who have never set foot on our campus have tried to create an image of Live Oak High School that simply is not true.

We are a very diverse society in America. The issues of race relations and immigration are certainly a national conversation in the 21st century. In some respects, our students can teach us a lot about how to engage appropriately in that conversation. For example, on their own, many students have decided to wear white and purple clothing today as a show of solidarity.

This has been a teachable moment for our children, and this conversation has certainly not been easy, but they have not shied away from it. Most want to engage in an open, honest conversation with each other about race, relationships and how we can get along. Most of the kids on our campus have said 'enough is enough.' They want to get back to normal.

Maybe the lesson from this is to turn down the rhetoric, and turn up the listening, and allow communities like Live Oak High School to have that conversation meaningfully outside of the glare of a national spotlight.

Freedom of expression is a sacred American value. The point of the lesson learned here for all of us is that not only should we celebrate freedom of expression, but we should go about that thoughtfully and fairly.