

'I just don't like the black kids' comment by Fresno vice principal causes uproar

By Carmen George

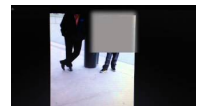
A video shot by a student at Scandinavian Middle School in Fresno shows school Vice Principal Joe DiFilippo saying, "I just don't like the black kids." DiFilippo was placed on paid administrative leave. The Bee obscured the child standing next to DiFilippo. Read the story: http://www.fresnobee.com/2015/03/17/4432367_i-just-dont-like-the-black-kids.html <http://www.fresnobee.com/2015/03/16/4430740/scandinavian-middle-school-vice.html> THE FRESNO BEE

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The day after Scandinavian Middle School Vice Principal Joe DiFilippo was placed on paid administrative leave for saying "I just don't like the black kids" in a video shot on the east-central Fresno campus, a couple dozen former students gathered outside Tuesday to share their concern with teachers. Several chanted "I love black people" and "black power."



The video, recorded on a student's cellphone outside the cafeteria, has caused an uproar among many students and parents.



Fresno Unified spokesman Jed Chernabaeff said the 15- to 20-second video that was posted on YouTube was brought to the attention of district administrators on Friday after parents brought it up with school administrators.

On Tuesday, he said an outside investigator still was gathering facts in order to make a "credible determination." Chernabaeff did not say how soon the investigation would be finished. Once that investigation is complete, he said, "the district will respond appropriately."

On Tuesday afternoon, a flustered mother, Ann Frank, stormed off Scandinavian Middle School's campus saying, "If he (DiFilippo) said it, he needs to be fired."

In the video, a student can be heard asking, "Mr. DiFilippo, who at this school do you not like?" After one student responds "all of us" — followed by inaudible comments from another student — DiFilippo can be heard saying, "I just don't like the black kids."

Chernabaeff said DiFilippo has worked at Fresno Unified for 18 years and has been at Scandinavian Middle School — where 11% of students are black — since August 2010.

Asked whether administrators receive training in how to interact with students regarding racial and ethnic subjects, Chernabaeff did not directly address the question. He did say Fresno Unified provides its staff with "a variety of professional learning opportunities" and expects its employees to "maintain the highest ethical standards."

Novella Coleman, staff attorney with ACLU of Northern California and a former teacher, said, "It is never appropriate for school staff who are tasked with educating our youth to say they do not like kids of a particular race." She added: "School administrators and teachers' attitude toward students of a particular race inevitably affects their expectations of students' educational achievement and students' access to equal educational opportunities."

A couple dozen former Scandinavian Middle School students — released early from nearby McLane High — talked about their discontent with DiFilippo on Tuesday while gathered outside the middle school shortly before students were dismissed for the day.

John Johnson, 14, said DiFilippo once told his older brother he “looked funny” because he had long dreadlocks and to change his hair.

Several students said they felt singled-out for disciplinary action by DiFilippo because they were black, while students from other racial groups weren’t bothered or weren’t disciplined as harshly. To illustrate the point, Isaiah Johnson, 15, described an instance where some students were being pulled aside for wearing red shirts — a prominent Fresno gang color. “He was picking on every black person with a red shirt — mostly me.”

Jarious Lamar, 14, said because of the comments DiFilippo made in the video, “my mom doesn’t trust this school.” He said his mom is planning to remove his sister from Scandinavian Middle School and enroll her in another school.

Another mother, who asked not to be named, said outside the campus, “It makes me question what (my stepson) has been experiencing this whole past year — and there has been other things that have been raised to my attention of what goes on at this school.”

B.T. Lewis II, pastor of Rising Star Missionary Baptist Church in southwest Fresno, said DiFilippo’s comments are sweeping through Fresno. “This maybe is an opportunity for him to find other employment where he can pick and choose the color of people that he has to deal with.”

Lewis is a member of Fresno’s Faith in Community which has been hosting panels to discuss the subject of race and racism. He said DiFilippo’s comments are “indicative” of the problem.

“People have become comfortable living in a bubble, as if race is not an issue in our community. It is still a very real problem in this community and in this country.”

Contact Carmen George: cgeorge@fresnobee.com, (559) 441-6386 or [@CarmenGeorge](https://twitter.com/CarmenGeorge) on Twitter.