

ACLU of Wisconsin: Commends court decision for Cedarburg School District to address racial harassment at its schools

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CEDARBURG — The ACLU of Wisconsin applauded a judge's ruling in favor of a Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction directive requiring the Cedarburg School District to seriously address racial harassment at its schools, affirming DPI's verdict last summer that Cedarburg had failed to investigate a student's report of racial harassment properly.

After the ACLU's filing of a [discrimination complaint](#) on behalf of a Cedarburg parent, the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction ordered Cedarburg School District to conduct a factual investigation into a report that a biracial student had been subjected to persistent racist slurs, jokes, and comments at Cedarburg High School, and that some students had allegedly expressed a desire to see Black Lives Matter protesters run over by cars.

Instead of adhering to DPI's directive and conducting a reasonable investigation into whether a racially hostile environment was present in Cedarburg schools, the District challenged the verdict in court, arguing in an appeal that the agency's standards were unreasonably high and that the further action called for was unnecessary and excessive.

Not long after CSD filed its appeal, a video surfaced on social media of Cedarburg students chanting the n-word at an off-campus party.

After hearing oral arguments, an Ozaukee County Circuit Court judge largely sided

with DPI, affirming its assessment that Cedarburg had neglected to take even the most basic measures to find out whether a racially hostile environment existed within its schools. The rejection of Cedarburg's appeal means that it will now have to re-investigate, as DPI ordered last summer.

After the ruling, the Cedarburg School District sent out a misleading email to District parents, stating that "the court determined that DPI erred in its finding that the District did not follow its own anti-harassment policies when responding to certain harassment complaints" and that the court "also found that the District adequately investigated certain complaints of harassment." The email also called DPI's directive "extraordinary and burdensome measures."

In actuality, the court ruled that the District had conducted an inadequate investigation into key allegations of the complaint and ordered a new investigation.

"We are happy that the outcome of this case will force Cedarburg School District to finally comply with what the DPI required them to do last summer. It is nonetheless disappointing that litigation was needed for CSD to do right by Cedarburg students and parents by looking into and meaningfully addressing reports of racial harassment," said Elisabeth Lambert, Equal Justice Works Fellow with the ACLU of Wisconsin and the attorney on the case.

This decision is available online: <https://www.aclu-wi.org/en/-press-releases/aclu-wisconsin-commends-court-decision-cedarburg-school-district--address-racial>