

## New racial incident reported at Pittsford school; litigation started against district

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Rochester Democrat and Chronicle USA TODAY NETWORK

Already buffeted with charges of a tepid response to racist actions, the Pittsford Central School District could soon confront a lawsuit from a biracial student alleging she has been the subject of ugly racial taunts.

And on Wednesday, Pittsford Mendon High School principal Melissa Julian wrote in an email to staff that a student had seen the N-word and a swastika written on a table in a classroom and “had a visceral reaction.”

“I would ask you all to check your tables/ desks and if you see anything similar to please let any administrator know as soon as possible,” she wrote in the email, a copy of which was obtained by the *Democrat and Chronicle*. “If a student brings it to your attention, please pull the student aside, listen to them and share with them that you are concerned.”

In the past month, the school district has faced a growing chorus of complaints that it is not responding aggressively to racism within the schools.

One of the most prominent incidents involved one student on the Pittsford Mendon track and field team repeatedly using racial slurs against teammates of color. That episode may now be headed for litigation.

A biracial student this week filed a notice that she and her family intend to sue the district because of the alleged racial slurs she and others have confronted. The student is not identified in the legal papers.

The family’s attorney, Jeffrey Wicks, declined to comment and said the family will not comment either. The *Democrat and Chronicle* has reached out to the Pittsford school district for a response.

The legal filing alleges that:

- A particular student has called members of the track team the N-word and “monkeys,” and Julian and District Superintendent Michael Pero are aware of the incidents.

- The student has used racial slurs when referring to Urban-Suburban students who attend Pittsford

The notice of claim is the latest development in a brewing controversy over racism in Pittsford, particularly the district’s response to it. In a series of emotionally-charged meetings over the last month, students and parents recounted numerous incidents where their complaints had been brushed aside.

Pero, the subject of much of the criticism, said recently that he recognized that the experience of students of color in Pittsford schools “isn’t always what we thought it was.” The district collected input from both parents and students at a listening session and intends to incorporate it into long-term planning on top of steps it’s taking now.

At the same time, an external group, Pittsford SOARs (Speaking Out Against Racism), has formed to hold that work to account. It launched earlier this month with 12 demands, including hiring a permanent districtwide inclusivity expert, reviewing curriculum, disclosing all incidents of racial aggression and increasing anti-racism professional development.

Tanishia Johnson, one of the lead SOARs organizers, said she believes the district can accomplish all those steps within six months.

“We’re really supportive of what they’ve come out with so far,” she said, referring to the plans Pero announced after the series of meetings. “We just want to see a concrete timeline around that.”



**Pittsford Sutherland student Lluvia Ayala-Pound listens to Tanishia Johnson speak during the end of “A Pittsford Community Conversation about Racism,” where Partners in Restorative Initiatives worked with district families and residents to talk**

Mendon.

**about racism.** MAX SCHULTE/ROCHESTER  
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■ The student at the focus of the legal complaint asked the girl to stop calling her offensive names. A day later, Julian told the biracial girl to leave the other girl alone.

■ Pero has not addressed the issue with the family that has filed the complaint, even though he said he would “remedy the situation.”

The biracial student has seen her grades drop and has missed classes because of the racial abuse, the legal filing alleges.