

Pittsford High adds security after racist incidents

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A Monroe County sheriff's deputy has been assigned to Pittsford Sutherland High School this week after a video circulated in which a white student brandished an air gun and threatened to "kill n-----s."

It was one of several recent incidents that demonstrate the district's stated efforts to combat racism among its students have not entirely taken root. In another, white students at Barker Road Middle School used the same slur while texting among themselves about enrolling Black people in "slave training" so they could "be on the field working like (expletive)s should."

In a letter to parents, Superintendent Michael Pero asked them to "join me and our school community in condemning hate filled, derogatory, racist speech and racist actions in any and all forms."

The incidents — in his letter, Pero said there had been "multiple," but did not say how many — are the latest in Pittsford, the county's wealthiest school district and one where Black students make up just 3% of the enrollment.

Black parents and students brought up a host of cases of discrimination at an emotional school board meeting and subsequent listening sessions in 2019. Earlier this year, the district apologized after a teacher used a worksheet that said Black people came to North America from Africa not in slavery but as employees.

The video from the Pittsford Sutherland video apparently was posted to social media in May but only circulated in the district at the end of last week.

It is just a few seconds long and features a white student looking into the camera. He says, "People be like, 'Why do you carry a gun?'" He then pulls out what appears to be a handgun and answers the question: "To kill (expletive)s." According to a press release from the sheriff's office, it is not in fact a real gun but rather an airsoft gun.

Some Pittsford parents criticized Pero for not responding sooner, in particular with the information that the gun was not real.

"For at least 24 hours, maybe longer, people didn't understand the weapon the student showed in the video was an air gun," one Black parent living in the district said, speaking on condition of anonymity for fear of harassment. "People started to become extremely concerned because they thought it was an actual firearm."

The other incident involved a text message exchange among three students at Barker Road Middle School. It used a slur for Black people, saying they should call an 800-number to be enrolled in "slave training. ... "Soon you'll be on the field working like (expletive)s should."

The students showed the exchange to others at the school, which is how the incident was discovered, according to a person who

Pittsford

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The anti-racism group Pittsforward is holding a unity rally from 3 to 4:30 p.m. Sunday, Oct. 3, in the heart of the village by the town hall.

shared the content of the messages with the *Democrat and Chronicle*.

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Pero wrote in his email that the various incidents resulted in “swift and serious disciplinary actions.” A sheriff’s deputy will be at Pittsford Sutherland “over the course of the next few days to provide a sense of security,” according to the sheriff’s office.

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