

## **Band director's comments divide students**

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SANTA FE — Was it over-sensitivity to silly jokes or a slap on the wrist for an educator who used humor too raunchy for a class full of teenagers?

Those are among the questions band members and their parents were asking after the school board decided to keep Doug Morris as high school band director.

Perhaps the main question, however, is can the program heal and move forward? For one parent, the answer is no.

“What I am upset over now is the backlash that will come from this,” said parent Julie Idema. “I agree with the school board. This needs to be let go.”

Trustees on Thursday ordered Morris to apologize for telling jokes peppered with sexual references and to attend sensitivity training. The board in a 4-3 decision rejected some band student and parent requests to impose a harsher reprimand.

“I don’t think these people who support Mr. Morris have any idea what they are doing and who they are supporting,” said drum major Katie Smith, 17. “I’m sick of people saying that we’re over-reacting. We’re not trying to ruin this man’s life.”

Morris’ supporters — and there are many — say that jokes about pigs having 30-minute orgasms and why dogs make better companions than wives were just that — harmless jokes that were blown out of proportion.

“What human wouldn’t envy a pig — a 30-minute orgasm?” said band parent Cassandra Shirley. “The dog jokes were funny as hell. I laughed at them. This is a few sheltered, vindictive, mean-spirited people that can never satisfy their thirst for revenge.”

Morris, who makes \$53,800 as band director, has not returned phone calls from The Daily News. But his friends and detractors say the ruckus over his comments and even the school board's handling of the incident has hurt the band.

Smith said she wouldn't be afraid to face Morris in class. But she said the school board has done little to protect her. "This shouldn't be an issue," Smith said. "I shouldn't be made to have to face him."

A male student who accused Morris of questioning his sexuality said that the band director made him uncomfortable.

"I don't think the trustees know the damage that they have done," said Richard Westmoreland, a 16-year-old bassoon player.

Others who have rallied for Morris say conclusions have been made that are untrue. "You don't destroy a man's reputation and his dignity and honor behind something like this," said Albert Merrell, a 16-year-old junior. "They have taken this way too far."

School board President Vince Megale III read into the record a statement that asked the community to begin healing itself and put this latest issue to rest.

"Sides have been chosen ... students are being pulled toward one camp or the other," said Megale. "This is not healthy for either side or the community. That which has been said or done cannot be unsaid or undone. It can only be asked forgiveness for and put into the past."

But for parents such as Marsha Brumley, who is president of the band booster's club, and Crystal Turner, this issue is far from over.

"They are facing re-election, and I'll remember who they were," said Brumley, who does not have a child in the band. "The people who voted for this man to continue this behavior will be out of office if I have anything to do with it."

Supporters say Morris came under fire in the first place because he was interested in the entire band program, not just the marching band. "A teacher shouldn't have to kowtow

to parents,” Idema said. “He made a mistake, and it’s over.”

The board instructed Morris to undergo sensitivity training that must be completed before the end of the year and to offer counseling to any student who felt a need.