

# Central School Board hears comments on both sides of superintendent issue

By Willis Patenaude

Discussion involving Central and Allamakee Community School Superintendent Nick Trenkamp continued April 21, during the first Central school board meeting open to the public since Trenkamp was placed on administrative leave at the end of March.

The decision stemmed from public reaction to a social media post about actions taken by Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy, to which Trenkamp stated, “Not only does Big Pharma peddle their drugs, they promote homosexuality and obesity.”

The post was quickly removed by Trenkamp, who followed with an apology, which has also since been removed from his Facebook page.

Several community members took to social media in the immediate aftermath, voicing concerns over Trenkamp’s leadership. They also alleged the current situation “magnified the deeper issues long voiced by employees for over a decade,” as Jarod Bormann said at the April 21 meeting.

Before April 21, the board had met twice since placing Trenkamp on leave, but those sessions, one of which included the Allamakee School Board, were held in closed session. The board remained tight-lipped about the situation, and community members who attended the meetings did not have a chance to comment publicly.

The April 21 meeting was moved from the high school media center to the auditorium to accommodate a crowd, which included Trenkamp, who sat with a small contingent of friends and family in the front row.

Board President Jared Funk called the meeting to order, then, for 45 minutes, 14 people took to the podium, both in support of and in opposition to Trenkamp.

Central Maintenance Director Eric Bond spoke on behalf of Trenkamp, questioning how a post on Facebook reached this point. He argued the situation went from a post to a “whole bunch of people

throwing out their opinions,” while also reminding everyone “there’s two sides to every story.”

Bond stated he would not still be working at Central if not for Trenkamp, who listened to his concerns and took steps to resolve them.

Tina Nelson, a single parent of three children who, until this school year, all attended Central, also supported Trenkamp. Her kids all “felt respected, safe and cared for by Trenkamp,” she said. He “took time to personally get to know [her] kids and they loved him.”

Nelson argued attacks on social media are the opposite of her experience with Trenkamp, and agreed with the overall view of the social media post. Those “type of commercials should not be played during programming times targeting our kids,” she said, adding the post has “been largely taken out of context.”

Brian Rodenberg, former superintendent at Midland School District and longtime friend of Trenkamp, was next to the podium. Rodenberg hired Trenkamp at Midland before he came to Central and said Trenkamp is “passionate about education,” has high expectations, has “advocated for the borderline students and did not want to leave anyone behind” and worked well with parents and administration while at Midland.

Rodenberg highlighted Trenkamp’s budget success, stating Central has been on a “steady upward trend in [its] unspent authorized budget from 2018 to 2023” and that trend looked likely to continue, all while funding from the state is “woefully low.” Central Business Manager Allison Walch was contacted to verify that statement, but did not reply.

As a superintendent, Rodenberg said you have to “make tough decisions [and] you will not keep everyone happy.”

Next, Jade Beck, whose “issue stems way before any of this public outcry happened,” suggested the social media post wasn’t why most people were in attendance. “I feel it’s un-

fortunate that that’s the direction everything went in,” she said.

The main issue for Beck was over handicap parking spaces, as well as Trenkamp’s alleged “rudeness” toward her during initial conversations, his recent attempt to remove handicap spaces (which was rejected by the city council) and his contradictory statements on the issue.

Beck said she “didn’t quite feel like a priority, and didn’t feel like [her] son was a priority.”

Another supporter, Ken McDonough, was on the Oelwein School Board when they hired Trenkamp. He said Trenkamp was hired because he “loves kids,” and is “committed to students [and] a good quality education for every student.”

“You’ve got a guy here that’s committed to the students, quality education through the community and has a child in the district. I think you’d be foolish to let him walk away or terminate his contract. He does a great job. He’s a great person,” McDonough said.

Former Central employee Angel Keppler spoke about her optimism when she took over as district secretary in January 2023, believing it would be her forever job and calling Central her second home. However, that “quickly spiraled,” when Keppler found herself on the “other side of the fence” against Trenkamp.

Keppler suggested it started when she “said no to additional work,” and from that moment, “criticism came hard and strong.” Keppler alleged that, during her time as district secretary, there were a “series of specially scheduled meetings” where Trenkamp let her know “all the things [she] was doing wrong,” while recounting there was hardly ever a “thank you or any sign of appreciation.”

Keppler labeled the tactics as “bullying and harassment [and] manipulating,” adding that she continues to struggle with issues of self worth as a result.

Perhaps the most high-profile speaker of the night was former Iowa House Representative for the 64th District, Anne Osmundson, who defended Trenkamp. Osmundson, who met Trenkamp six years ago when she took office, recounted interactions with him. Though they haven’t always agreed, she said he was “always courteous and respectful,” and she was “always impressed with his concern for each child’s education.”

“It seems to be a priority for him that each child has the opportunity to get the



Central School Board members listened to supporters and opponents of superintendent Nick Trenkamp during the April 21 board meeting. Trenkamp has been on administrative leave since late March due to concerns about a social media post he made. (Photo by Willis Patenaude)

best education,” Osmundson added. Trenkamp has “good intentions,” and she asked the board to “not let the media hype” influence their decision.

Former Central student Adam Koresh took the podium next, recounting a joke he made five years ago during the variety show. According to Koresh, that got him pulled into the office by both Trenkamp and current Central Principal Aaron Reinhart. As a consequence, they wanted to “kick [him] out of band.”

Koresh’s speech detailed several other incidents involving both Trenkamp and Reinhart, including one that resulted in Koresh being banned from the Central Facebook page. He ended his speech stating the board “needs to fire” Trenkamp and “leave it as a record” for when and if he attempts to apply for another job.

Koresh’s mother, Jenni Francis, used her three minutes to discuss the need for more checks and balances. She recalled an incident involving her son where he was forced by Reinhart to “listen to a person being murdered” with Elkader Police Chief Mitch Seitz, who was also present, as a punishment for an offense. Francis did not state the specific offense and Seitz, in a phone conversation, had “no recollection” of the event.

Francis also brought up that there are no disciplinary records for Koresh from 2018 to 2021, when he graduated, despite “all the problems with Mr. Reinhart and the follow-ups with Mr. Trenkamp,” turning the situation into a “he said, she said.” The paper was provided a copy of the disciplinary record by Koresh, and there is no record after Oct. 31, 2018, which Koresh commented on in his letter sent to the board.

One of the more vocal critics of Trenkamp was Jarod Bormann, who sent an 11-page letter to the board outlining his personal experiences. He spoke about chain of command issues that have devolved into a

“flawed loop” at Central, creating a dynamic that “silences staff, fosters distrust and reinforces a culture where speaking up feels risky and professionally unsafe.”

Bormann noted a breakdown in community trust he fears is not repairable if the status quo is maintained. He suggested the social media post was not an isolated incident, but systemic, and has led to large “numbers that have left the district over the last decade.”

An effort to obtain information on the employment trends at Central over the last decade went unanswered.

“We have talented people in this district, but when their voices are ignored or punished, they leave. And when they do, they leave behind not just vacancies, but messages—messages that the board would be wise to finally listen to, reflect on and act upon,” Bormann concluded.

Another critic, Abby Heitman, reiterated much of what she posted on social media, including that Trenkamp allegedly laughed when informed about an incident involving her son. That strikes at the heart of what Heitman views as Trenkamp’s continued “failure to act in a professional manner.”

Heitman also brought up that Trenkamp allowed a registered sex offender to attend a daddy/daughter dance and allegedly lied about making staff aware of it. In a separate exchange, Heitman said the incident showed a “lack of integrity [and] honesty,” though it’s unclear if Trenkamp violated a school policy regarding the issue. Funk was contacted to clarify the issue, but did not respond.

Heitman pulled her children from Central earlier this year and said Trenkamp has “not only damaged his own reputation, but that of the school board, the school district and our community” and requested the board discharge Trenkamp for “failure to act in accordance

with the administrative code of ethics.”

One of the final speakers was Kristin Dunlap, who acknowledged how difficult the situation was. While Dunlap said she did not agree with Trenkamp’s social media post, she was there to support him.

During 10 years working with Trenkamp on various committees, Dunlap said he never made her feel discouraged. Her voice was always heard, and she was never met in an “unprofessional manner.” She also spoke about a time Trenkamp was “respectful, encouraging [and] provided compassion” to her daughter after an incident when she got into trouble.

The final two speakers, Emily Christianson and Justin Vorwald, both offered statements against Trenkamp. Christianson shared examples of bullying endured by her children and directed her comments at Trenkamp and Reinhart, who she said failed to inform her of incidents.

Vorwald defended Trenkamp’s right to free speech, but recognized “employers can control the speech of their employees.” He said Trenkamp’s post was “damn ignorant,” but deeper than that post are people who work at the school who are “afraid” of Trenkamp. Vorwald acknowledged the tough job ahead of the board but did not openly take a stance.

In a conversation after the meeting with Trenkamp, who is unable to speak about the situation, he offered no comment. As of this writing, he had not yet met with the board and nothing was scheduled.

Reinhart and Central CEA President Staci Schmeling were also contacted for comment. Schmeling stated, “I don’t have any comments,” while Reinhart declined to comment on allegations that were directed toward him. Funk simply said, “I am going to defer you to our original statement. The district will provide more information when it is appropriate.”

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