

March 30, 2021

Dear Fellow Citizens of Evanston,

I'm writing to you as a neighbor and concerned parent. Approximately two years ago my world was shattered when I learned of numerous grooming and criminal sexual acts that had occurred at Evanston Township High School involving the sexual abuse of my then minor daughter by Evanston Township High School Security Officers. Needless to say, since learning of this information there has been a whirlwind of emotions: disbelief, anger, betrayal and hurt, to name a few. As I work each day to heal and move forward from this incredibly difficult event, I want to not only focus on healing my daughter, myself and my family, but to also ensure that no other student (and their family) is ever subjected to this pain and torment again.

ETHS and its employees have hidden, dismissed and swept under the rug decades of unlawful sexual conduct between minor students and Evanston Township district employees. I was once proud to call myself an alumn of ETHS, but now my memories are marred. Sadly, as I think back, I realize this is not Evanston's first encounter with unlawful sexual conduct inflicted upon minor students by ETHS employees. As a former ETHS student myself, I personally know of at least 3 prior incidents involving my own high school classmates who were similarly sexually targeted by ETHS employees, but chose (as is their right) to remain silent. At that time, I expressed disappointment about the School and its employees' conduct with my closest circle of friends and family, but I can no longer remain silent. This must change! It is time to break down this wall of secrecy. ETHS and the school district have for decades "turned a blind eye" and allowed their employees to sexually prey on minor students. These employees use their positions of authority to manipulate minor students into unlawful sexual relationships, and influence their silence with rewards or with threatened punishments at school if they are disobedient or hint at revealing the relationship. I know firsthand because my daughter was subjected to this sickening conduct. It has been a well-known, open secret at ETHS since the time I was a student that school employees engaged, and continue to engage, in these kinds of sexual relationships with minor students. That open secret continued while my daughter was at school. This is especially the case as the average age of ETHS Security Officers has become younger and younger over the years. These young employees are even more flagrant with their open and notorious inappropriate grooming and sexual conduct with minor students, including on the ETHS campus itself! We must put an end to this dangerous conduct before another minor student is sexually assaulted.

My goal and hope is that we can come together as a community to influence a shift at ETHS and in the school district away from the predatory culture of exploitation of minor students. We must return to an environment where this type of behavior is unacceptable and where there is an expectation that this will never happen again! The purpose of this letter is to ensure that comprehensive changes and improvements are enacted at Evanston Township. This should include, but not be limited to a review of the following protocols:

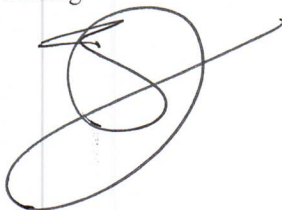
- Comprehensive hiring practices including thorough background checks
- Continuous training re: appropriate communications and sexual abuse and harassment
- Strict protocols re: communications with students
- Strict protocols re: reporting suspected abuse and inappropriate contact

Every parent is absolutely entitled to the presumption that their child is safe while at school. Sadly, this has not been the case for students attending ETHS for some time.

We need to stop this unlawful conduct and make change happen now. I know we can help make Evanston Township the proud pillar of education in our community that it once was, and an institution committed to the development of the next generation of leaders.

Respectfully,

Sophia Sterling

A handwritten signature in dark ink, consisting of a large, stylized 'S' followed by a horizontal line extending to the right.