



Delivering Extraordinary Value to Families
Steel Valley School District
District Administrative Offices

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Edward Wehrer
Superintendent

February 3, 2022

Dear Steel Valley Families, Staff and Community,

As most of you are aware, the Steel Valley School District filed a report to the WPIAL Board of Directors regarding a playoff football game against South Side Area School District on November 12, 2021. I supported filing that report because of the descriptions by our players and coaches of repeated unsportsmanlike play and usage of racial slurs, specifically the N-word, during the game by our opponents. While occasional episodes of such behavior had occurred during my time at Steel Valley as a player and coach, never before had I experienced or heard of a game in which we were demeaned frequently. Our community should be proud that our players reacted with self-discipline and restraint; one player took himself out of the game because he was on the verge of losing his self-control, and that action was a credit to him, his family and his coaches.

On Tuesday, February 1, we declared our case to the WPIAL during a hearing that lasted nearly four hours. Our players, coaches and school leaders presented their statements in a credible fashion. The testimony by South Side Area confirmed that a month prior to the playoff game at issue a member of their team had behaved the same way in a game against Carlynton High School, as witnessed by the Athletic Director at Carlynton. Combined with our statements, that admission established a pattern of racist behavior by our opponents, which should have reinforced the trustworthiness of our complaint.

Yesterday morning, the WPIAL informed us of their ruling. The WPIAL decided that both Steel Valley and South Side students, coaches and administrators must take part in mandatory diversity and sensitivity training or face penalties that could escalate to include a postseason ban. While the Steel Valley School District fully supports increased diversity and sensitivity training for students, coaches and administrators at all WPIAL schools, we are perplexed by the WPIAL's ruling. The worst slur in our culture was directed against Steel Valley players that November night. Receiving the same consequences as South Side Area suggests a moral equivalence that does not exist within my code of ethics, and I fear that the WPIAL decision will deter teams in the future from making similar complaints.

We strongly encourage and believe in mandatory training for all WPIAL schools that advances systemic change and works toward eliminating racism in interscholastic sports and in education. However, the needed change is unlikely to occur unless the WPIAL more adequately adjudicates incidents like this one.

The Steel Valley School District is extraordinarily proud of our diversity. Our profound disappointment stems from a desire for change. We will advocate for diversity, equity and inclusion within our district and in interscholastic athletics, and we will continue to stand up for our students whenever they experience racism.

Sincerely,

Edward Wehrer
Superintendent