

Third Swastika Found at Middlesex, This One Drawn With an Eraser on a Desk — Officials Weigh In

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In the midst of activities at Middlesex Middle School meant to promote tolerance and educate students about the harmfulness and "impact of symbols and the language of hate," another Nazi Swastika was recently found at the school, Principal Shelley Somers told parents.

"It is with great concern and sadness that I report to you that we have found another swastika on campus," Somers wrote in a Monday night email. "It was drawn on a desk with a pencil eraser. A student saw it and immediately reported it to his teacher."

School officials and police couldn't determine who was responsible for drawing it. Swastikas were first found at the school on Sept. 9, with a few drawn in crayon [on an outside window](#). Within a week, on Sept. 16, another was found [on a bathroom stall](#).

After those incidents Somers announced that she was scheduling a school assembly co-ordinated with the Anti-Defamation League.

The goal of the assembly is partly "to develop a common language for discussing issues of diversity, name-calling and bullying," as well as to "provide a forum in which students will feel safe to speak out about issues of diversity, bullying and name-calling," Somers told parents back in September. The assembly will be held on Nov. 7.

The school has brought up the subject of tolerance in advisory classes, social emotional learning lessons, and the social studies curriculum, Somers wrote.

"I need your help and support in eliminating anti-Semitic and racist attitudes in our school community," Somers wrote to parents. "Therefore, I am planning a parent meeting, to which I will invite clergy members and community leaders, to discuss strategies to eliminate this unacceptable behavior."

At Tuesday night's Board of Education meeting, both board Chairperson Tara Ochman and schools Superintendent Alan Addley mentioned the latest swastika.

"We also certainly as a board are facing the critical issue of looking at some of the symbols that have been found at our schools lately and the hate symbols and hate speech," Ochman said.

"These symbols have no place in our schools and it is important that we educate children on the history, the emotion and the pain that is tied up with symbols such as this, so that they understand that their friends, and their neighbors and all of their fellow students are truly affected by these actions.

"I firmly believe that that's one of the No. 1 goals that we face here in education, is educating children about the past, what it means, how not to repeat it and kind of what can happen when you ignore it. So I look forward to hearing from the administration on their next steps, certainly giving them time to find the most effective steps. I'm sure the board will have more to say about this matter."

Addley said:

"Clearly, no matter what the reason is, it is disturbing and unacceptable that these acts of hate continue at the middle school. The district is, as the board chair has stated, unequivocal in its stance [not to tolerate] all these acts of bigotry, anti-Semitism, prejudice and discrimination.

"Nonetheless, we recognize that the incidents continue, and despite the middle school's overwhelming positive school climate and its efforts with the student body, both recently and over the period of many years, to actually address the topic, the recent incidents that have occurred continue.

"Moving forward the district does look for new ways to partner with parents, members of the Darien

community and agencies to assist us in addressing these complex issues in order to ensure a respectful and inclusive learning environment for all our students.

"May I editorialize a little bit? Some of these acts do take you back and I can tell you, being at the school, it's not characteristic of the climate and culture at that school, but these issues still need to be addressed, perhaps beyond the middle school discussions.

"The administration will look to work collaboratively together and bring back some comments and suggestions to the Board of Education."

Full Text of Somers' Email

Here's Somers' announcement:

Good evening, Darien Families.

It is with great concern and sadness that I report to you that we have found another swastika on campus. It was drawn on a desk with a pencil eraser. A student saw it and immediately reported it to his teacher. Although the incident was thoroughly investigated, we were unable to determine who was responsible.

While we have taken steps to educate our students about the impact of symbols and language of hate, this latest disheartening incident of anti-Semitic propaganda cannot be tolerated.

We have addressed intolerance through advisory classes, social emotional learning lessons, and our revised social studies curriculum, and will continue with a Nov. 7 grade level "Step Up" assembly coordinated by the Anti-Defamation League.

Despite these efforts, I need your help and support in eliminating anti-Semitic and racist attitudes in our school community. Therefore, I am planning a parent meeting, to which I will invite clergy members and community leaders, to discuss strategies to eliminate this unacceptable behavior. You can expect an email from me confirming the date and the time.

My staff and I have worked hard for the past three years to develop a climate of kindness at Middlesex. Although I truly believe that the majority of our students value diversity and respect differences, I can neither overlook nor ignore the acts of those who bring hate to the forefront.

Thanks for your continued support.

Shelley