



# DUXBURY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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TO: School Committee  
FROM: John J. Antonucci, Superintendent  
SUBJECT: Summary Report on the Investigation into Duxbury High School Football Program  
DATE: June 10, 2021

On or about March 24, 2021, the Duxbury Public Schools administration requested that an external investigation be conducted in response to allegations of anti-Semitic and racially offensive slurs being used by players on the Duxbury High School Varsity Football Team at a game on March 12, 2021. Attorney Edward R. Mitnick of Just Training Solutions, LLC was retained to oversee this investigation.

After a comprehensive and thorough investigation, Attorney Mitnick released his report to me on June 7, 2021. The report itself is approximately 56 pages in length and includes detailed information of a highly personal nature relative to various individuals. Given the statutorily protected privacy rights of the various witnesses, participants, and staff members identified in the report, as well as the personnel record nature of the document, the following summary report has been prepared, relative to that portion of the investigation relating to the Football Program and constitutes the maximum disclosure we believe is possible under applicable state privacy laws.

The investigation focused on the actions of members of the Duxbury High School Football, its coaching staff and the general culture of the Football Program. The investigation included interviews with 52 different witnesses, comprising current and current and former coaching staff, current and former football players, parents, and school employees including teachers and administrators. A number of additional individuals who may have had personal knowledge of the events declined to participate.

In addition to the direct witness testimony, the investigator also received many testimonials and character references from residents, teachers, former football players and other concerned individuals supporting the Program and coaching staff; as well as emails, letters and unsolicited phone calls from individuals with complaints about the Program and coaching staff.

As part of the investigation, the Investigator also reviewed pertinent Duxbury Public Schools policies, including the [Non-Discrimination Policy \(AC\)](#), the [Vision-Values-Mission-Goals Policy \(AD\)](#), the [Harassment Policy \(ACAB\)](#), the [Staff Conduct Policy \(GBEB\)](#), and the [School Ceremonies and Observances Policy \(IMD\)](#).

Following the completion of his investigation, the Investigator concluded as follows:

**1. *Allegations Pertaining to Anti-Semitic Slurs***

There was sufficient credible evidence to conclude that offensive and inappropriate conduct occurred in violation of the School District's [Vision-Values-Mission-Goals Policy \(AD\)](#), [Harassment Policy \(ACAB\)](#), and [Staff Conduct Policy \(GBEB\)](#) as the result of anti-Semitic words and other references to the Holocaust by members of the football program.

There was evidence suggesting that the use of this language was a systemic issue and had happened at practices potentially as far back as 2010. Sufficient credible evidence was found to support the conclusion that coaching staff were aware of the use of such terms during practices.

There was not sufficient credible evidence suggesting that these terms were used during games in prior seasons.

As part of the findings on this matter, the Investigator concluded that it was uncontested that during the March 12, 2021 football game between Duxbury and Plymouth North on March 12, 2021, an offensive lineman called out "Auschwitz" to refer to a play/blocking scheme for the lineman. It was further uncontested that the use of Jewish-related words (e.g. "Rabbi" and "Dreidel") were introduced into the word association play calls several years ago, likely sometime during the 2010-2012 football seasons.

By all accounts, at that time the varsity team started to use the word "Rabbi" to call a play that had originally been called "Rabbit." "Rabbi" then evolved into other Jewish terms such as "dreidel," "yarmulke" and "Hanukkah" being used for the "Rabbit" play.

The actions of the coaching staff in condoning the use of the above offensive terms for the "Rabbit" play is clearly inconsistent with the District's policies. The use of any religious, ethnic, racial, or sexual related term as an audible or a nickname can be deemed offensive to a reasonable person and give rise to actual acts of discrimination. The use of seemingly benign religious terms for plays and nicknames is no less appropriate than using words commonly associated with racial or ethnic cultures.

**2. *Culture of Profane Language and Boorish and Sophomoric Humor***

There was significant credible evidence to support a finding of the existence of a culture of profane language and boorish and sophomoric behavior present within the Duxbury Football program.

Coaching staff engaged in profane and vulgar language and condoned the use of profane and vulgar language by students.

The investigation found use of profanity on the sidelines, as well as insensitive and homophobic slurs. Profane language was used as slogans by coaches and players. Sexually offensive jokes and innuendo were used by coaching staff in front of players.

3. ***Allegations Pertaining to Religious Prayer Prior to Games and Team Mass at a Catholic Church***

There was sufficient credible evidence to conclude that the use of Religious Prayer was condoned prior to football games and that a “Team Mass” was held at a Catholic Church on the Wednesday Evening before the annual Thanksgiving Day game, in violation of the School District’s [Non-Discrimination Policy \(AC\)](#), [Vision-Values-Mission-Goals Policy \(AD\)](#), [Staff Conduct Policy \(GBEB\)](#) and [School Ceremonies and Observances Policy \(IMD\)](#).

The investigation determined that it was undisputed that the team would recite “The Lord’s Prayer” immediately before every game and that this had become a tradition for the team. The prayer would be uttered in the locker room during home games and under the goal posts during away games.

It was also undisputed that the Wednesday evening before the annual Thanksgiving game, the team traditionally went to a “Team Mass” at the Holy Family Catholic Church. Although no Team Mass was held in November 2020 due to the cancellation of the football season last fall due to Covid, this religious event had apparently been going on annually for many years.

It is also undisputed that prior to the Catholic Mass, the team would gather for a “Team Meal” sponsored by the Grid Iron Booster Club, that was held in the basement of the Holy Family Church.

Both the condoning of a religious prayer by a team prior to a football game and the holding of a “Team Mass” at a Catholic Church are blatant violations of School District Policy. The prohibition of school prayer in the classroom is no less prohibited in a school related sports activity such as a public high school football game.

In addition, the holding of a “Team Mass” in a Catholic Church where a religious service is conducted is just as intrusive as having a religious service conducted by a priest in the locker room prior to a game. As stated in the School District’s policy, “The United States Constitution and the Constitution of the State of Massachusetts and related court rulings clearly establish the concept of ‘church and state separation’ and the ‘preclusion of sectarian instruction in public schools.’” The prohibition of these religious activities in association with a public school activity is clear. Such sectarian events can be seen as intimidating or coercive to students not of the Catholic faith. Non-Catholic or non-religious players might feel pressure to join the prayer circle or attend the mass just to please certain coaches or their peers. Students may also be too intimidated to speak up and challenge the appropriateness of such unconstitutional, sectarian religious activities.

4. ***District Response to Incident***

There was sufficient credible evidence to conclude that Duxbury Public Schools administration took prompt and appropriate action in response to the allegations stemming from the March 12, 2021 football game.

The findings summarized above relate to the investigation into the Football Program stemming from the anti-Semitic language used during the March 12, 2021 game. As part of the investigation, additional allegations of employee misconduct occurring outside of the Football program were raised and investigated, some of which were substantiated. As such matters fall squarely within statutory privacy laws, it is not appropriate to comment further on these.

The following corrective actions have been implemented and/or identified:

- The District will commission a full external review of our Athletic Program, including our Athletic Program Handbook, coaching evaluations, budget/business functions and the role of athletic booster organizations. As part of this review, the District will also request recommendations for best practices.
- An Athletic Advisory Committee has been established to review and make recommendations relative to our Athletic Program. While the exact role of the Advisory Committee continues to be developed, it is anticipated that it may include providing input on our Athletic Program Handbook, and participation, as appropriate, in hiring committees for coaches/staff. This Advisory Committee may also provide feedback and recommendations on other decisions relevant to the Athletic Program. Our Athletic Advisory Council will be developing expectations for coaches and athletes by creating “Portrait of a Coach” and “Portrait of an Athlete” profiles.
- Our Spring Coaches participated in an extensive Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion training prior to the 2021 season.
- Our football players participated in a mandatory Holocaust Presentation by a third generation Holocaust Survivor. After the program, many players stood in line to shake the presenter’s hand and thank her for her time and for sharing her family’s incredible story.
- Our football team participated in a mandatory training on *Becoming an Ally and an Upstander*.
- Our School District has partnered with Northeastern University’s Center for the Study of Sport in Society and will be training a core group of coaches and student athletes this fall. We have established a partnership with NEU and will ensure that our coaches and student athletes understand how to confront biases, use respectful and sensitive language, and address racism and discrimination on our Duxbury sports teams.
- Our District staff will participate in several Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion trainings during the 2021-2022 school year.
- Appropriate personnel action will be taken based upon the findings in the Investigation Report. Due to applicable collective bargaining and/or other contractual provisions, as well as Massachusetts laws relative to personnel records and individual privacy rights, details as to any such action will not be disclosed publicly.

In closing, while there are no excuses for what has occurred, moving forward, it is the mission and goal of the Duxbury Public Schools, working with the greater community, to foster and create a diverse and inclusive educational setting, both in our classrooms and in our athletic and co-curricular programs.