Media Alert: Vongphakdy Family Response to Resignation of Band Teacher Rob Perkins

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WAUSAU – On the evening of Monday, June 12, the Vongphakdy family learned that the Wausau School Board had accepted East High School Band Director Robert Perkins' resignation from the school district. Earlier this year, the Vongphakdy family had filed a complaint against Perkins for using racial and homophobic slurs in the classroom, and for harassing and intimidating their son—a student in Perkin's band program—in a manner so severe that it caused him to experience panic attacks and withdraw from school.

In its initial response to the family's complaint, the district administration acknowledged that Perkins made racial and sexist comments in the classroom, but asserted that the conduct did not constitute unlawful harassment because the comments were purportedly "made in fun." After the family challenged the administration's decision, and after many more current and former students came forward with their own stories of harassment and bullying by Perkins, the District school board retained an attorney to conduct an independent review. The attorney overturned the administration's initial decision citing procedural errors and opened a new investigation. Although the initial investigation was procedurally mishandled, it confirmed racial and homophobic slurs in the classroom with witness corroboration. Mr. Perkins' resignation comes as the new investigation is getting underway.

"Rob Perkins' resignation is an important step towards making Wausau East High School a safer place," said Twan Vongphakdy, the student's father. "Since our family first addressed the school board about our child's experiences, so many others have come forward to share their own stories of harm and trauma that Perkins' bullying caused. We are relieved that future students will be spared these damaging experiences."

"However, the problems our family's experiences have exposed are much bigger than one person. Multiple administrators failed to identify and bring an end to Perkin's egregious conduct. Instead they made excuses and tried to brush his bullying under the rug, in a way that caused deep harm to our child. The district must take accountability for these failures and learn from them so that they never happen again to another child. This accountability is necessary before true healing can begin."