
MALONE DEFENDS HIS REMARKS ; HE SAYS ASSAULTS ARE NOT ACCEPTABLE, BUT TEACHERS NEED TRAINING IN HANDLING DISPUTES; [City Edition]

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Full Text (688 words)

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The phone didn't ring yesterday at the Church Hill home of Reginald M. Malone Sr. He had disconnected it.

Malone, the 7th District representative on the Richmond School Board, had given up trying to fend off angry calls in response to his remarks about an alleged assault of an Armstrong High School teacher Friday by a 15-year-old male student.

The teacher, LaVerne Hamlin, a 32-year veteran of the city system, was beaten after taking a classroom phone away from the student, according to school officials. She required hospital treatment for her injuries.

The unidentified student was charged with aggravated assault and sent to the Richmond Juvenile Detention Center.

Malone was quoted in Saturday's Times-Dispatch as saying the student's behavior was inappropriate. He also said, "You've got to be careful who you take the phone from," and suggested the teacher could have headed off a violent confrontation.

A sample of the responses that subsequently scorched Malone's phone line was offered yesterday by a teacher with 18 years of experience in the city schools.

"How he could make such a comment is beyond me," said the teacher, who asked not to be identified. "Teachers are supposed to be in charge in the classroom ... but the rules are not enforced. I don't think anyone has a handle on the situation."

"I stand by what I said," Malone said in the wake of the weekend phone barrage. "An assault on a teacher by any student is not acceptable at all. But our teachers must be trained in how to handle confrontations."

Such training has been discussed by the School Board and administration "many times but not mandated," he said. "I'm going to insist that the board look at this training issue again."

Another longtime city teacher said the system offers "assertive discipline" training to teachers as an option. "With what is going on in the schools now, I would recommend taking that option seriously."

"We have found recently that some our students don't have [behavioral] boundaries," said the teacher, who also requested anonymity. "Even if we have rules posted and state them over and over, some students will do what they want to do. Nothing will stop their violent behavior."

Malone, an Armstrong graduate who joined the School Board in 1998, said the city schools are in "a systemic crisis" where "rules are not enforced firmly, fairly and consistently."

He said fewer than 3,000 disruptive students "dictate the climate of schools" that enroll 27,000 and employ 4,000.

He advocates "schools within schools," where students with behavior problems are separated from the rest of the school population and undergo behavior-modification training as well as regular instruction.

Malone said he is rethinking the wisdom of placing phones in classrooms. He supported their installation four years ago for use in emergencies and so teachers could contact parents before and after classes. The phones are supposed to block calls outside the school unless the teacher enters a code.

"The [school] board and administration have to demand that any telecommunications equipment in the classroom be properly used and supervised," Malone said, adding that he didn't know the circumstances of the Armstrong student's use of the phone Friday.

Students are not allowed to carry cell phones and pagers at Armstrong or at most other city schools.

Malone said he is not well-acquainted with Hamlin, who teaches biology and physics, "but several of my children [who are] in their 30s took classes with her and remember her as an outstanding teacher and person." She received a national award this year for excellence in science instruction.

Hamlin was treated and released Friday at the emergency room of Medical College of Virginia Hospitals. She could not be reached yesterday.

"I'm a product of the '50s," Malone said, "when students sat in rows, raised their hands before speaking. And when the teacher said, 'No,' you didn't argue. I think it's our nature to still think of public education as it was 30 or 40 years ago.

"But it's a different world now... and we've got to make sure our teachers are properly trained to deal with today's students."

Credit: Times-Dispatch Staff Writer

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People: Malone, Reginald M Sr, Hamlin, LaVerne

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