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# Tay Anderson censured by Denver school board: “There is a line and it was crossed”

Flanked by local Black leaders, 23-year-old school board member decries “high-tech lynching”



Kathryn Scott, Special to The Denver Post

Surrounded by his supporters, Denver Public Schools board member Tay Anderson



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Denver Public Schools' Board of Education voted to censure one of its members, Tay Anderson, on Friday after an [investigation released this week](#) concluded he had flirted online with a 16-year-old student before knowing her age and made coercive and intimidating social media posts.

The six-month, third-party investigation initiated by the school board did not substantiate any of the anonymous claims of sexual assault levied against Anderson.

Just before the board met to vote, Anderson shot back in a fiery news conference with local Black leaders, calling his treatment a "high-tech lynching," a phrase used by [Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas](#) during his confirmation hearings 30 years ago.

Friday's special meeting marked the first time school board members spoke publicly about the investigation's findings that Anderson had exhibited what they've called "behavior unbecoming of a board member." One by one they denounced his conduct, voting 6-1 — Anderson cast the lone no vote — to censure, or publicly reprimand, their colleague.

The board does not have the authority to strip Anderson of his position, so the censure marks its only avenue of formal condemnation. The board members said the censure was a necessary tool for calling out Anderson's use of his position of power to cross boundaries.

"This is how we as board say, there is a line and it was crossed," board member Rev. Bradley Laurvick said.

During the meeting, Anderson delivered a passionate defense of his actions, reading from a [statement he'd posted online](#) that invoked white supremacy, historic lynching and vile threats made against him and his family since sexual assault allegations first surfaced this spring.

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“On March 26, 2021, false allegations led to my life changing forever,” Anderson said during the meeting. “That was the day I became known as a rapist to our community. Does anyone listening know how that feels? To know you didn’t commit an act you’re being accused of, but having people believe it and call for your career, your freedom and your life to be over.”

As each board member took turns explaining their vote, Laurvick addressed the “young women who participated in this investigation, who are watching right now to see if your experiences and stories mattered to us: They do. And you do. I hear you. I see you. I believe you.”

Board member Jennifer Bacon spoke in raw terms about being the only other Black school board member, and how she and Anderson are “inextricably linked” because of the color of their skin.

“White supremacy is real,” Bacon said. “But some of us can only take people so far. And we also need to recognize that personal actions need to be held accountable, too.”



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Denver Public Schools board member Tay Anderson, left, listens as other board members speak and then vote to censure Anderson during a school board meeting at the Emily Griffith Campus in Denver on Sept. 17, 2021.

Angela Cobián, another board member, said Anderson’s actions do not “merit a seat on this board” adding that she hoped he “reconsiders his position as (the



"I will not resign," Anderson said at the news conference before the vote. "Let me say that one more time — I will not resign."

Anderson said his online communication with the 16-year-old was not sexual in nature, and that he ceased messaging her once he found out her age. He also strongly denied retaliating on social media against any of the people involved in the investigation.

"It is ludicrous to me for anyone to make the argument that by choosing to not allow people who have harmed me into my life, and that this would constitute an 'act of retaliation,'" Anderson said.

The investigators had reported that Anderson made social media posts that were "coercive and intimidating toward witnesses," and noted that a post by him on Facebook saying he would cut off anyone who disparaged him over the sexual assault allegations was perceived by at least one school board member as a threat.

After Anderson finished his remarks during the meeting, board member Barbara O'Brien said she "hoped this would be a bit more of an opportunity for introspection, but apparently it's not going to be."

Jeanna Hoch, right, who says she is the mother of two Denver Public School students, interrupts Denver Public Schools board member Tay Anderson, asking him to resign, as he holds a press conference in front of the Emily Griffith Campus in Denver just before the other school board members voted to censure him during a school board meeting on Sept. 17, 2021. At his pre-meeting news conference, Anderson gathered a collection of Black leaders who lambasted his treatment in explicitly racial terms.

Dr. Tony Bradley, representing the NAACP chapter for Colorado, Montana and Wyoming, said that the organization was "deeply troubled" by the censure vote and it opens up the school board to a civil rights inquiry.

Bishop Jerry Demmer, president of the Greater Metro Denver Ministerial Alliance, called the investigation a "witch hunt."

"... When you can't find something to go your way, you come up with a lot of false allegations," he said during the news conference.

As Anderson stepped to the podium Friday, he was met by a protester shouting through a megaphone, "Tay Anderson is not a victim" and calling for his



Anderson has remained defiant in proclaiming his innocence in the face of the allegations that [first surfaced](#) in March that he had sexually assaulted an anonymous woman.

"My body has hung from a tree long enough," he [tweeted](#) before Friday's censure vote, "let's get today over with."

He opened his remarks to the board Friday by referring to DPS parent Mary-Katherine Brooks Fleming — who in May alleged before a state legislative committee that a predator in the school district had committed rape, sexual assault or sexual misconduct against 62 students — as "my Carolyn Bryant." (Bryant [admitted to lying](#) about allegations she made against a 14-year-old Black boy named Emmett Till, whose horrific [1955 lynching](#) in Mississippi helped spark the Civil Rights Movement.)

In her testimony, Brooks Fleming didn't name Anderson, but the DPS board later released a statement saying it had been informed that she was referring to Anderson.

In his speech to the school board, Anderson said the censure "raises questions about the precedent being set for future DPS board actions and parameters around potential future investigations."

"This is unprecedented and reeks of anti-Blackness and is rooted in systems that uphold white supremacy," Anderson wrote in a [blog post published Thursday](#).

The [96-page investigative report](#) released Wednesday found the anonymous woman's sexual assault accusation made in March through Black Lives Matter 5280 was not substantiated, nor were the [allegations](#) made by Brooks Fleming, identified by the investigators as "Reporter 1." The investigators reported that Brooks Fleming also was involved in bringing the initial woman's allegation forward through BLM 5280.

Investigators did find, however, that Anderson used his political influence to make unwelcome sexual comments, advances and contact toward female students affiliated with a student-led gun control group that he co-founded three years ago.

Anderson, the report said, admitted to most of those allegations and apologized.

**Updated 9:45 a.m. Sept. 18, 2021** *This story has been updated to clarify the account of Mary-Katherine Brooks Fleming's legislative testimony.*

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