



## Parent-organized prom open to all Gary high school juniors and seniors

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By Michael Gonzalez Post-Tribune correspondent May 5, 2014 9:20PM

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GARY— Parents who organized a separate prom at Marquette Park Pavilion for Theodore Roosevelt College and Career Academy said they will open the doors to the event to all Gary high school juniors and seniors.

The move received lukewarm blessings from EdisonLearning, the private company running the school. Meanwhile, a local parenting expert said there are important lessons to learn from the dispute.

Dwayne and Jo Hunter, who led a petition drive and a parent group protesting some of Roosevelt leaders' decisions, said their prom is an option for kids who want to build memories in their home town.

In February, Roosevelt administrators announced this year's prom will be held at Centennial Park in Munster, upsetting students and parents who said they were left out of the planning and decision-making for the annual rite of passage.

"A lot of kids don't want to go out to Munster for their prom," said Dwayne Hunter, a local pastor. "And, the consensus (among parents) is we don't want our kids to go to Munster."

"If we don't support what we do have here in (Gary), it's not going to get any better," added Jo Hunter.

The separate prom will be held May 9, the same day as Roosevelt's school-endorsed prom, only because the school already reserved the day months ago without putting any deposits down before they chose to hold the event in Munster.

Gary students can attend the Marquette Pavilion prom for \$20 a person or \$25 a couple, far less than most area proms. Also, Roosevelt students who already have purchased tickets for the school event can show their tickets at the door to get into the separate prom.

An EdisonLearning official said the Hunters and other parents have the right to hold their own prom, but school officials sent a letter to students with information on the school prom, its costs, security details and more.

"They certainly are in their right to have their own prom, but the school had the responsibility to make it clear the prom at Centennial Park is sponsored by the school and is open to Theodore Roosevelt students," said spokesman Michael Serpe. "From everything I've gathered, (Roosevelt Principal Donna) Henry and other administrators at the school completely understand their desire to do something different and give them their blessing."

There is an encouraging side to parents who feel empowered to get so deeply involved and schools that support that involvement, but the dispute arose from communication problems between school officials and parents and students, said Laura Wynn, director of the Indiana Parenting Institute.

"I just think it's a matter of miscommunication, and each party is doing what they feel is the right thing to do under the circumstances," she said. "I think the situation would not have escalated to this particular degree given the opportunity for both parents and administrators to talk and work together and formalize a solution."

Schools want parents to get involved, and much of IPI's work focuses on providing information and tools to parents for getting involved in their children's schools and getting parents to take leadership roles, she said.

"These particular parents wanted to be engaged in school and with the administration, and Roosevelt has the potential to be an

excellent school in the community but they need to support the parents and they need to communicate with the parents in order to get that"

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