RETIRES

UPrep

UPrep founder who banned speech

Joseph Munno, the founding leader of University Preparatory Charter School for Young Men, retired from the school Monday in the midst of an uproar over his refusal to let the school’s first black valedictorian speak at graduation last month.

The valedictorian, Jaisaan Lovett, ended up delivering his speech in a much more public setting — at City Hall, on the city of Rochester’s YouTube channel. He told Munno in the speech, “You couldn’t break me.”

In a statement released Monday morning, UPrep Board of Trustees President Edward Yansen said that, “given the situation and considering the mission and values of UPrep,” it had accepted Munno’s retirement.

Justin Murphy Rochester Democrat and Chronicle USA TODAY NETWORK

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Jaisaan Lovett PROVIDED PHOTO
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“It is the Board’s responsibility to put the best interests of the school and its students at the forefront,” Yansen wrote. “The Board of Trustees recognizes the role that Mr. Munno has played in helping establish the school and creating a robust educational experience for young men living in Rochester. Given the situation and considering the mission and values of UPrep, we have accepted his retirement, effective Monday, July 9th. We are initiating an immediate national search for new leadership.”

Munno did not answer his phone for comment Monday morning.

Lovett, who will attend Clark Atlanta University in the fall, said Monday morning: “I didn’t think that was going to happen. (But) honestly, I think they made the right choice.”

Much of the controversy over Lovett not being permitted to give his graduation speech has centered around the fact that he is the first black valedictorian in the school’s four graduating classes. His father, La-Jason Lovett, said he believes racism is the culprit, but Lovett himself was more cautious.

“I know we have our disagreements but I wouldn’t go so far as to say it was a racial thing.”

Since the story was first publicized in the Democrat and Chronicle, Lovett has been inundated by local and national media attention.

“My mom’s starting to get frustrated because everyone’s trying to call and set up appointments for interviews and stuff,” he said. “I’m getting a lot of messages from everywhere, not just Rochester, from people saying I’m inspiring them and it’s making a difference in people’s lives.”

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