

Ham steak called hate crime

by UPI

LEWISTON, Maine - A ham steak tossed onto a school lunchroom table has a Maine community struggling with what constitutes a hate crime and bruised race relations.

After the April 11 incident in Lewiston Middle School, a public forum held by the city's Sun Journal newspaper had to be halted because of the overt hostility on display.

"A lot of anger and hate has been flying around," said Steve Wessler of the Center for the Prevention of Hate Violence, who has received hate e-mail and two threatening phone messages, the newspaper reported Tuesday.

School Superintendent Leon Levesque said last week one student was suspended and more disciplinary action was possible as police investigated the incident in which a white student placed a ham steak in a bag on a lunch table where Somali students were eating. Muslims consider pork a dietary taboo.

"We need to take a look at this and review how a careless act is degrading and causes hurt to other people," Levesque said.

A 14-year-old Somali boy, who was with four other Somali students at the table, said he "felt angered, offended."

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