

Proud Boys' Presence Leads to Metal Detectors, Deputies at School Board Meetings

Posted by Elle Kehres | Oct 12, 2021 | Instagram, Pre-K - 12 Education, Safety



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Tensions have been rising at the Orange County Schools Board of Education meetings since the beginning of the pandemic – first with public scrutiny over enforced COVID-19 health precautions and now with the presence of an extremist hate group.

At the Orange County Schools in-person board meeting September 13, a group of parents gathered to protest some of the COVID-related restrictions up for discussion – such as mask wearing and spectator limits for sporting events. Those parents, however, weren't the only members of the public in attendance.

“There were two men in Proud Boys shirts and hats,” said Chair of the Orange County Schools Board of Education Hillary MacKenzie. “One wore a stocking over his face, which completely obscured his entire face for the whole meeting. The other one told our board during public comment that someone should tie rocks around our necks and we should throw ourselves in a river.”

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The Proud Boys self-identify as fraternal group spreading an “anti-political correctness” and “anti-white guilt” agenda. Designated as a hate group by the [Southern Poverty Law Center](#), they are known for anti-Muslim, misogynistic and white nationalist rhetoric and maintain affiliations with known extremists.

At that scheduled work session, MacKenzie said not only were the Proud Boys disruptive, but School Resource Officers had to take a knife and spear off someone entering the meeting.

“One man carried a sign that read ‘the Trail of Tears ends with the board of education,’” MacKenzie said. “Which I took to mean he was comparing genocide to COVID precautions.”

That wasn't the only incident in September.

On September 24, the board became aware of an event that was being billed as a “tailgate protest” at Orange High School in Hillsborough. The protest was a result of the planned, school-sanctioned tailgate being cancelled for safety reasons.

“At that protest, again, there were lots of parents and students who were simply protesting the spectator restrictions and mass limits,” said the board chair, “but there were also ten Proud Boys in full gear with flags patrolling the right of ways outside of campus.”

MacKenzie said the Proud Boys used a megaphone to shout racist, transphobic, and homophobic slurs along with other threatening language.

“They told counter-protesters at one point to go kill themselves,” she said.

Orange County Sheriff Charles Blackwood said no laws were broken as the Proud Boys were on DOT Right of Way and not on school property. He said, while disrespectful, their language did not go outside the bounds of free speech protected by the First Amendment.

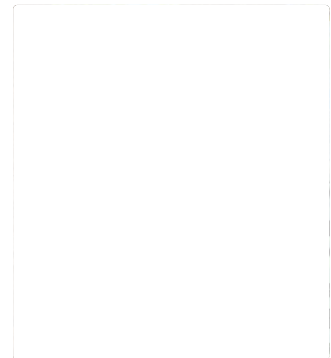
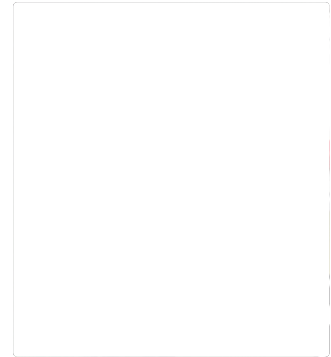
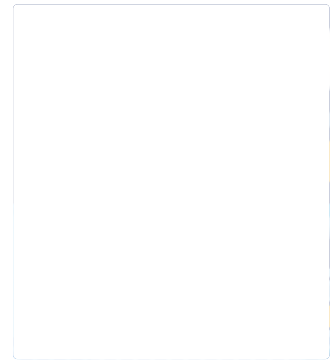
“Although I support people's right to protest and demonstrate, I personally do not believe standing in the streets hurling hateful and intimidating insults at one another is a productive way to solve our issues,” said Blackwood. “I submit civil dialogue is a better model to present to students who learn best by example. If adults can identify the issues, seek reasonable solutions, and communicate in a way that does not threaten public safety, we might actually get somewhere.”

MacKenzie said the school board will continue to coordinate with the Orange County Sheriff's Office on best measures to keep students and staff safe. The school has since hired off-duty deputies to protect public safety and avoid disruption of its meetings – including at the latest work session held Monday night.

While the work session remained open to the public, it was explicitly listed that no protests, demonstrations, or gatherings of any kind will be permitted on the campus of A.L. Stanback Middle, the designated meeting location. A [notice from the school board](#) also stated that those in attendance are required to pass through a metal detector prior to entering the building.

MacKenzie said while she believes in the peaceful protesting of government decisions, she does not support making room for intimidation, threats, or violence.

“I just really want to encourage community members and elected officials to speak out against extremism.” MacKenzie said. “It has never been more important than right now.”



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