

ON THE SPOT

Written by By Cody Begaye Sun Correspondent
Friday, 18 October 2019 01:14



Parents, citizens demand answers to Tohatchi High lockdown

The lockdown and evacuation of Tohatchi High School on Sept. 23 remains fresh in the minds of some parents whose children attend the school.

But, for a select group of parents, the answers they have received from the school and Gallup-McKinley County Schools, the district, fell short of their expectations.

So, a group of concerned citizens attended the Oct. 7 Board of Education meeting in Gallup looking for more answers, as what many Tohatchi High students heard Sept. 23 doesn't match up with law enforcement reports.

The FBI Albuquerque field office reported that one shot was fired at a vehicle crossing through a perimeter set up outside of the high school. The perimeter and lockdown was set in motion by Navajo Police Department in response to a call to the school from a man intending to go onto the Tohatchi High campus and harm himself.

ON THE SPOT

Written by By Cody Begaye Sun Correspondent
Friday, 18 October 2019 01:14

But, despite parents expectations, the Tohatchi lockdown was not on the board's sparse agenda for Oct. 7, and no comments on the matter were made by board members or Superintendent Mike Hyatt.

Tensions increased when it was discovered that none of the parents and/or concerned citizens in attendance at the meeting had prior permission to speak on the matter during the public comment portion of the meeting.

But they persisted, so board Vice President Christopher Mortensen suggested they officially adjourn the meeting and take the discussion of the Tohatchi incident offline, without the district's video stream.

Mortensen's motion was not received well. Some people in attendance claimed the board did not want the discussion made public.

"It has nothing to do with that," Mortensen said. "We have rules about when you can submit for public comment, and you are past that."

Despite the pleas of parents at the meeting, the board made the decision to adjourn.

Messages for further comment on the meeting aftermath from district officials were not received by press time.

Meanwhile, when social media swirled with reports of an active shooter on the Tohatchi High campus, people commented, and said students reported hearing multiple shots fired. They expressed anger on Gallup Sun's Facebook page of its initial Sept. 23 report, which stated there was no active shooter on campus, and students weren't in any danger.

The Sun later relayed a report from law enforcement, which indicated there was only one shot fired, which also didn't set well with folks on social media.

ON THE SPOT

Written by By Cody Begaye Sun Correspondent
Friday, 18 October 2019 01:14

Ophelia Anthony, contacted the Sun and described what her nephew reportedly went through during the incident.

“[My nephew] was told to go to the elementary school,” Anthony said. “He heard two shots fired around the corner of where he was. He said 300 kids stampeded to get back into the high school through two doors.”

Anthony’s account lines up with what another parent, Marv Chavez, told the *Sun*.

“My daughter said the principal said over the intercom to run to the elementary school,” Chavez said. “She was at the high school. Her classmate heard popping sounds echo from the courtyard.”

Parents and students described a chaotic scene, which hasn’t been confirmed by GMCS officials.

“Kids were crying and trampled on,” Anthony said. “[My nephew] went to a classroom and him and some students barricaded the door.”

As for parents and family members of Tohatchi High students, they will get another chance to have their voices heard. The next GMCS Board of Education meeting is set for Oct. 28 at Tohatchi Elementary School.

By Cody Begaye
Sun Correspondent