

PRANK GOES WRONG

Written by By Molly Ann Howell Sun Correspondent
Friday, 22 April 2022 06:43



Senior folly ends in suspensions. Story Page 10

A senior prank has led to some trouble at Gallup High School.

According to a criminal complaint filed by the Gallup Police, about 15 to 20 people entered the school on the night of March 31. These people proceeded to decorate the school's commons and the principal's office with streamers, balloons, signs, and glitter, among other decorative things.

Gallup High's Principal Tammy Hall was the one who called the police. In a press release that was published on April 7, the Gallup McKinley County Schools district called the incident "illegal, damaging and disrespectful."

The press release goes on to state: "Breaking and entering, vandalism, and destruction of school property is illegal and is considered criminal activity."

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Video footage from security cameras allowed the school to identify many of the students who participated, and now those students are currently suspended.

And many of the parents of those students are now fighting back.

“This senior prank that they did on April 1, it’s no different than decorating for prom or decorating for homecoming or even rallies,” Geneva Begaye, a mother who has a senior son who is on the school’s basketball team, said.

Parents and students alike are calling the school’s actions unreasonable.

“They’re taking it way further than it should be [taken], because it was just supposed to be a fun prank, a senior prank; it’s tradition for everyone,” Alyssa Gonzales, the captain of the Gallup High dance team, said. “And now they’re denying us the right of education. We’re being treated as criminals; a lot of people can’t even go into the school because they have a list saying certain people can’t be there.”

The police report notes that the students caused zero dollars’ worth of damage, with no items identified as broken, but more as “trashed.”

Meanwhile, the school district put out another press release on April 12 that said that the “current estimated cost to remediate the damages is exceeding \$30,000.” The amount is not broken down into specifics.

Gonzales and Begaye both said that there was no permanent damage done. Gonzales said she even helped clean up Hall’s office.

The April 12 press release states that spray paint, shaving cream, and other forms of paint were used on windows and walls. Floors were allegedly damaged because students pushed vending machines across a hallway to block the stairways.

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Jamie Blue Eyes, Gonzales's mother, and Begaye, noted that their children will have been out of school for two weeks on April 15.

According to the district's secondary behavior handbook, a student who has caused criminal damage to district property will face up to three-days of in or out-of-school suspension. The student also has the right to a hearing if the violation warrants one.

Blue Eyes said that her daughter is being "denied an education." She said that when the suspensions happened the district said students would be able to participate in virtual learning, but claims that's not happening.

"The teachers are not logging on ... and [the students] are not able to get on and get the curriculum that they need for assignments," Blue Eyes said. "There's no virtual learning right now, so being denied her education is a big deal to me."

Blue Eyes added that Gonzales has emailed a couple of her teachers, but only a few have replied. So far, that's the only way her daughter has been able to continue to do school work.

The suspended students are not allowed in the school building, they're not allowed to participate in any extracurricular activities, and Begaye said even graduation is up in the air at this point.

At the time of publication, none of the students' hearings have been scheduled, although the April 12 press release said that "due process" would be taking place soon.

"The investigation [into the matter] is mostly complete," the press release reads. "Policy will continue to be followed, which includes due process."

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A school board meeting that was scheduled for April 11 at 1 pm was canceled earlier that day, although it is unknown if it was canceled because of the ongoing investigation.

The *Sun* attempted to reach out to GMCS Superintendent Mike Hyatt, GMCS Assistant Superintendent of Business Services Jvanna Hanks, and Hall, but none of them responded to the requests for comment as of press time.

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