

BREAKING: Albemarle teen charged in racist Charlottesville High School threat

By Nolan Stout & Katherine Knott Mar 22, 2019



ANDREW SHURTLEFF/THE DAILY PROGRESS Charlottesville City Schools Superintendent Dr. Rosa Atkins (right) receives comfort from city school board members Lisa Larson-Torres (middle) and Juandiego R. Wade (left) after a press conference on the arrest of a 17-year old male resident of Albemarle County in connection to threats made against students Charlottesville High School Friday at the Charlottesville Police department.

Community members in Charlottesville rallied Friday to condemn hate as police announced the arrest of a juvenile accused of posting a racist

threat online that closed the city school division for two days.

Police Chief RaShall Brackney credited “detective work” for finding the suspect: a 17- year-old Albemarle County male who identifies as Portuguese. The teenager is not a Charlottesville High School student, as described in the post.

A second teenager was arrested Friday over an online threat that referenced Albemarle High School. Brackney said the two threats are not related.

“We want the community to know that any threats made against our schools, credible or not, are taken seriously and will be thoroughly investigated,” Brackney said. “... We want the community and the world to know that hate is not welcomed in Charlottesville. Violence is not welcomed in Charlottesville. Intolerance is not welcomed in Charlottesville.”

Referencing President Donald Trump’s comments about the Aug. 12, 2017, white supremacist rally in Charlottesville, Brackney continued: “In Charlottesville and around the globe, we stand firmly in stating there are not very fine people on both sides of this issue.”

The investigation began after an anonymous 4chan post on Wednesday threatened an ethnic cleansing in the form of a shooting at the poster’s school, telling white students at CHS to stay home.

The suspect was arrested at 6 a.m. Friday and charged with one felony count of making threats to a school and a misdemeanor charge of harassment by computer.

Brackney said she wouldn’t reveal the suspect’s motive or whether any weapons were recovered.

“I find it particularly troubling that a person who is not a part of the Charlottesville school system and community made such a hateful, divisive threat under the guise of being a Charlottesville High School student,” said schools Superintendent Rosa Atkins at a press conference Friday.

Atkins said the school system and community have made an effort to have difficult conversations about race and equity, and they have worked to build trust and relationships since the white supremacist rallies and violence of 2017.

“And this comment attempted, although it failed, to undermine our efforts and our community,” she said.

AHS threat

The CHS post was one of two threats made this week. Albemarle County police arrested an Albemarle teen at midnight Friday for a threat posted on social media Thursday that referenced Albemarle High School. The teen was charged with one felony count of making threats to a school.

Albemarle schools remained open Friday, but there was an increased police presence while the investigation continued.

Police are not releasing any information about the teen, including gender, age or school. The suspect is being held at the Blue Ridge Juvenile Detention Center.

Albemarle Police Chief Ron Lantz said authorities didn't think anyone else was involved with the AHS threat.

When asked whether the Albemarle threat was inspired by the Charlottesville threat, Lantz said “questions similar to the ones you have raised are being explored by our detectives.”

Albemarle County Public Schools directed all questions to the Commonwealth’s Attorney Robert Tracci, who declined to comment on the case because it involves a juvenile.

‘We are here for you’

With an arrest made, Charlottesville officials turned their attention to reopening schools Monday.

“Even though this threat has been resolved, the fear and anxiety that it provoked is real,” Atkins said.

Counselors and other support staff are working on a plan to respond and support students “in order to bring back calm in our system,” Atkins said. The counselors will be available to students and staff next week.

Atkins applauded the efforts of teachers and community members to provide lunch for students and play games with them.

Atkins said this is the division’s third year of being targeted. She said a community rally was a way to show support to students of color, who have been the subject of threats.

“We know this is tough for you to be the target, but we are here for you and we will stand with you,” she said.

The threat also came amid standardized testing for some students. Atkins said that Thursday and Friday were designated as make-up

days for the writing test.

“So we have to reschedule that, and we have to give our students enough time to now get this out of their thinking and as quick as possible get them back to the focus on academics because there’s a future beyond this,” she said.

Mayor Nikuyah Walker said she hoped the way the city came together helped to “lighten the fear” among students and the community.

“As for the nation, this is another example of where we are in this fight against injustice and hatred in our country,” she said.

Sen. Tim Kaine, D-Va., and Gov. Ralph Northam also weighed in on the CHS threat.

“I am dismayed and very concerned by the hateful threats that have closed schools in Charlottesville,” Kaine wrote in a tweet. “Expressions of violence and hate are never acceptable, whether written on an anonymous online forum or on the side of the building.”

Northam said his team was in touch with local and state authorities.

“Every student should be able to attend school without fear of violence or hatred,” he wrote.

Some local parents and activists, however, want school officials to do more. On Friday afternoon, two banners were hung from bridges spanning U.S. 250 calling on the division to confront white supremacy.