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A Catholic high school in the Diocese of Charleston is boosting security and stepping up diversity training after expelling two students tied to racist videos and threats against the institution.

Robert Loia, principal of Cardinal Newman School in Columbia, announced the steps and discussed the expulsions during an emotionally charged town hall meeting Aug. 8. The gathering followed days of controversy set off by racist and threatening videos distributed via text messages by a 16-year-old former student.

The former student, unidentified because of his age, was arrested by the Richland County Sheriff's Department July 17. He was charged with making threats in regard to statements that he was going to "shoot up" the school.

Loia said the second student who was expelled was connected with the videos, but he did not elaborate in what way.

Parents were unaware of the videos and threats until local media reported on them the weekend of Aug. 3-4. Loia and the sheriff's department have been under heavy criticism for not releasing information as soon as the videos came to light in mid-

July.

Cardinal Newman officials said they were made aware of the first set of videos after a parent found them on her child's tablet July 13. The videos featured the 16-year-old using racist language and talking about violence against African Americans. After investigating, school officials were shown a second set of videos that featured the same student making threats against the school.

Hundreds of parents and community members attended the town hall meeting, along with diocesan officials, pastors and principals from area parishes and schools.

Sandra Leatherwood, diocesan superintendent of schools, began with an emotional statement.

"I am here as an African American mother of three sons who attended Cardinal Newman," Leatherwood said. "I am in my 44th year of Catholic education and I never thought I'd be attending a meeting on this topic. Growing up in south Alabama, I witnessed firsthand hatred, bigotry and prejudice. ... I hope that what we plan here will ensure that your children and any who attend our school won't have to endure what we are facing tonight."

At the meeting and in a statement released afterward, Loia called the videos "evil, disgusting and wrong."

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He presented a timeline of events and said he did not initially release information to parents because he thought any threat to the school had been eliminated by the student's arrest.

"I am sorry we did not let you know sooner," he said. "Please accept my apology."

Richland County Sheriff Leon Lott updated reporters Aug. 8 about the case.

Lott said his department did not release information earlier because its investigation was continuing and he and other officers believed any potential threat to Cardinal Newman students ended when the 16-year-old was arrested.

He said the youth was detained at a juvenile facility after the arrest. Sheriff's deputies also executed a search warrant shortly afterward at the student's home and removed 20 guns from the residence.

The sheriff echoed community frustration that the student cannot be charged in relation to the videos.

"As shocking and disturbing as those videos are, there is no state law against them," Lott said. "It's a shame that South Carolina does not have a law against hate crimes."

Parents and residents said they have misgivings about the safety of their children and the community in the wake of the videos. Others questioned who shot the footage and asked whether the students who viewed it but did not report it would face disciplinary action. Loia said other disciplinary action is being taken but would not provide specifics.

During the meeting, one woman read a letter written by an African American student at Cardinal Newman who described incidents of racial insensitivity she has experienced at the school. Other parents raised concerns about past incidents of bullying and insensitivity that they say went unaddressed.

In response, Loia said Cardinal Newman will institute several initiatives to address the concerns.

Among them, Loia said the sheriff's department will be on campus on the first day of school Aug. 20 and stay for about two weeks. He said the school also will hold active shooter training for students and faculty, undergo a threat assessment from the sheriff's department, and look into hiring additional security and adding gates at campus entrances.

Loia said crisis counselors will be available for students during the first week of school, and access to counselors and student support staff will be expanded.

The principal said there also are plans to hold ongoing diversity and bias training for all students and faculty, include more material about multiculturalism in all classes and incorporate more diversity in hiring.