

Anti-racism demonstrators make presence known at SKPS meeting

BY MATT RAWLINGS
Of the Keizertimes

A protest outside the Salem-Keizer Public Schools (SKPS) district office stole the show at the school board meeting on Tuesday, May 11.

The demonstration was organized by youth activist group, Latinos Unidos Siempre (LUS) — board meetings are closed to the public and don't feature live testimony. Sandra Hernández-Lomelí, director of LUS, said that the gathering was an anti-racism demonstration in the wake of a May 1 gun rights rally in Salem and wanted the board to make a statement denouncing white supremacy.

"Last week we witnessed the community be terrorized by white nationalist hate groups, such as The Three Percenters, Proud Boys, and others," Hernández-Lomelí said. "This weekend Salem was not a safe space for BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and people of color) and Queer communities. During this nationalist rally, speakers threatened to take armed Proud Boys into our school grounds to replace School Resource Officers. Vice-chair Danielle Bethell and chair Satya Chandragiri have the responsibility to denounce these hate groups and uphold the equity lens. They must show the community that they do not stand with violent hate groups that threaten the safety of our Black and Brown students."

It was ironic that we were talking about diversity and inclusion during parts of the meeting when the noise was really loud.

— SATYA CHANDRAGIRI
Chairperson, SKPS board

Members of the Association of Salem-Keizer Education Supports Professionals (ASK ESP) were also present at the demonstration, speaking out against understaffing and workplace bullying.

Board members Sherrone Blasi and Marty Heyen attended the meeting virtually. Danielle Bethell was not in attendance.

During the Spotlight on Success portion of the meeting, air horns and loud bangs on the glass windows made the discussion inaudible at times. Superintendent Christy Perry and the board attempted to push through the

noise, but there were multiple instances where Heyen and Blasi could not be heard over their computer microphones and had to either write-in a question they had about an agenda item or vote on an action item using a thumbs up or thumbs down.

There were many instances when board members and presenters had to nearly shout into their microphone in order to be heard.

"I am sorry that some of the things we were discussing weren't audible because of the loud noise," Chandragiri said. "It was ironic that we were talking about diversity and inclusion during parts of the meeting when the noise was really loud. I am proud of us for staying focused on what we were supposed to do. We have a lot of work ahead of us."

Chandragiri said that the board was notified about the demonstration before the meeting and that the district provided security for board members.

"We were prepared. I wasn't worried about my safety. We had a lot of

systems put in place," Chandragiri said.

During the meeting, McNary principal Erik Jespersen was honored after being named the Oregon 2021 High School Principal of the Year by the Oregon Association of Secondary School Administrators (OASSA) and the Coalition of Oregon School Administrators (COSA). The board unanimously approved the vote for Larry Trott for Willamette Education Service District Board of Directors, Zone 5 and approved the sale of the Rosedale School property in south Salem.

The board also unanimously approved the Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month Proclamation.

"(Tuesday) was a perfect celebration of diversity," Chandragiri said.

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