



November 14, 2018

VIA EMAIL

Dr. Lori M. Mueller, Superintendent
Baraboo School District
423 Linn Street
Baraboo, WI 53913

Dear Superintendent Mueller:

We write on behalf of the Zionist Organization of America (ZOA) whose mission includes fighting anti-Semitism in schools and on college campuses. We were appalled to learn that approximately 50 male students at Baraboo High School were photographed last spring giving a stiff-armed Nazi salute. The photo was taken before the high school's junior prom. The fact so many of your students engaged in this heinous anti-Semitic conduct and not one reported it, demonstrates that the school district has a severe problem with anti-Semitism. Indeed, you are legally obligated to effectively address the problem and prevent it from recurring, under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act.

The problem goes beyond the particular students who engaged in the reprehensible behavior. We understand that the photographer who took the photo and posted it on his website is a parent of one of the students in the photo and also a former teacher. In addition, other parents and community members were [reportedly](#) present when the disgusting photo was taken, and not one apparently objected or intervened.

Rather than taking responsibility for his actions and his abysmal judgment, the photographer is now making preposterous excuses, [claiming](#) that the students in the photo were not giving the Nazi salute; they were simply waving, at his direction.

This claim insults our intelligence, and the intelligence of everyone else who has seen the photo. It is crystal clear from the photo that the students are saluting in exactly the way the Nazis and their collaborators did, when the Nazis attempted to annihilate the Jewish people.

This is confirmed by a message posted with the photo on an anonymous Twitter account, which we understand is run by two members of the school's senior class. The message said: "We even got the black kid [in the photo] to throw it up." Moreover, Jordan Blue, a student in the photo who had the decency and good sense not to participate in the salute, [acknowledged](#) that his peers were giving the Nazi salute and he publicly condemned it.

We are pleased that you recently issued a statement to parents, to let them know that the district is investigating this shameful and horrific incident; working with parents, staff and local

authorities; and committed to pursuing any and all available actions, including legal actions, to address this matter. Much more needs to be done, to comply with your obligations under Title VI.

We strongly recommend the following steps:

1. Issue another statement to every family in the district that forcefully condemns the Nazi salute as anti-Semitic and hurtful to Jews, and also condemns the students who saluted, by name. They should feel the shame of their actions. The statement you already issued did not use the word anti-Semitism, nor did it mention the hurtful and harmful impact the salute has on Jews. You must make that clear. The statement should also identify the additional specific steps the district plans to take. We strongly urge you to include the steps described below.
2. Discipline every student who gave the Nazi salute, as well as the students who disseminated the photo (with the message about “the black kid”) on Twitter. At least a one-week suspension is necessary to show the seriousness of the wrongdoing. The consequences should also include a requirement that each student read a book about what the Jews endured during the Holocaust, and write a paper about the book. The paper must also include the student’s reflections on his own conduct and why the conduct was reprehensible and wrong. We would be pleased to make appropriate book recommendations. Students and their parents must understand that properly completing this assignment is a condition of graduating.
3. Educate your students annually, at every grade level, about anti-Semitism, the Holocaust, and the Nazis’ attempted genocide of the Jewish people. The education program must include a Holocaust survivor speaking to students about what Jews and others endured at the hands of the Nazis, and an age-appropriate film about the Holocaust, followed by a discussion led by an experienced and knowledgeable professional. For the younger grades, we recommend the documentary *Paper Clips*. For the older grades, and particularly the seniors, they should be required to watch *Schindler’s List*. In addition, we urge you to take advantage of the online lesson plans offered to you by the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum in Poland.
4. Provide teachers with training to recognize and address anti-Semitic incidents. The photographer was himself a teacher. Other teachers presumably were present or in the area when the photo was taken. Sufficient training about anti-Semitism could have prevented this incident, and certainly would have improved the effectiveness of the district’s response to it.
5. Encourage parents and community members, including law enforcement, to attend the educational programs that the district will be offering. They plainly need it. The photographer is a parent and former teacher. Other parents were reportedly present when the photo was taken, and not one apparently objected or intervened. In a message that they are assisting the school district with its investigation, the Baraboo Police Department

referred to the photo as “controversial” – as if the photo’s heinousness and vileness are open to debate. There is nothing controversial about the photo. It is indisputably despicable, hateful and anti-Semitic, and everyone in the community must understand that fact.

6. Send a letter by certified mail to the photographer, Peter Gust, forcefully condemning his actions, and making it clear that he is prohibited from taking photos of students in the district on school property or for school events. Even if Gust did not instruct or encourage students to give the Nazi salute, he nevertheless took the photo when they posed that way, and he exercised appalling judgment by posting the horrific anti-Semitic photo on his website. He has nothing to be proud of with regard to this incident.
7. Since not a single student or district employee reported this shameful incident at the time the photo was taken, publicly affirm and distribute the district’s policy against anti-Semitism and other forms of discrimination, and publicize the means by which students, parents and district employees may report these problems.
8. Prevent retaliation against Jordan Blue, the student in the photo who did not participate in the Nazi salute and who condemned it. Reportedly, Jordan Blue has already endured [bullying](#) by his peers, unrelated to this incident. He should not be targeted any further, particularly for doing the right thing here.

We look forward to hearing from you about the steps that the district will be taking. Please consider us a resource.

Very truly yours,



Morton A. Klein
National President



Susan B. Tuchman, Esq.
Director, Center for Law and Justice

cc: Members, Board of Education (via email)

