

Science Experiment Bombs:

An Undisguised Case Study on Media Influence on Local Decision-Making Processes

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EDA7069 Ethics in Education

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September 27, 2014

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Abstract

In 2013, a 16-year-old high school student was arrested and subsequently expelled from school for causing a small chemical explosion. Eventually, the charges were dismissed, contingent on the student completing a diversionary program, and the student was readmitted to the school. News reporting drew international attention to the case, and the social media conversation on was extensive. In this undisguised case study, we present the case as it was reported in the media, and we draw attention to both the ethical decisions made by key players and to how the media may or may not have the decision-making process.

Keywords: *expulsion policies; Zero Tolerance policies; news media; social media; public opinion; media impact; policy implementation*

Introduction

Fosser and Glovey (2006) claimed students view undisguised case studies, ones based on actual events and recounted with greater adherence to the facts of a situation, as being more credible and more interesting than fictionalized, or disguised, scenarios. Additionally, Fosser and Glovey (2006) claimed, the analysis of an undisguised case study produces additional data, which in turn can be analyzed, yielding additional insight into the original case and into the general issue (p. 4). Each of these claims appealed to us as writers, as well. We felt this particular case—that of a high school student expelled because the student’s action was interpreted in particular way and in light of a particular policy—was of more interest than anything we could create and that it had been so widely publicized that we could not successfully disguise it. We also felt this particular undisguised case study could consider the added dimension of the

influence of public opinion, as shaped by the news media and by social media, in making ethical decisions. We, therefore, present the elements of the case in the order in which the news media reported them and we present only what was reported in the news media. It is our hope that the study of this case by students, teachers, researchers, and policymakers will yield further insights into this particular case and into the procedural and ethical issues involved.

Case Study

Accordingly, this case begins with the first news report, an online posting written by reporter Suzie Schottelkotte, to the Lakeland (Florida) *Ledger's* Web site shortly after midnight on April 23, 2013. The *Ledger*, owned by Ledger Media Group, claimed, in 2014, a daily circulation of 58,807 and a Sunday circulation of 75, 446. Additionally, Ledger Media Group claimed it received “733,000 monthly visitors [and] 8.16 million monthly page views” to its online site and that it reached “7 out of 10 Central Florida consumers” through any or all of its media offerings. Lakeland lies east of Tampa and southwest of Orlando in Polk County, Florida.

According to the United States Census Bureau (2014d), Polk County's estimated population in 2013 was 623,009 with a land area of 1,797.84 square miles (2010 figure) and a demography of 79.9% considered White alone, 19% as Latino or Hispanic, and 15.6% as Black or African American alone. The neighboring county to the west is Hillsborough County with an estimated population of 1,291,578 in 2013 within an area of 1,020.21 square miles in 2010. Hillsborough County consists of 52% White alone, 15.7% Black or African American alone, and 26% Latino or Hispanic (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014b). The per capita income of Polk County is \$21,674, slightly less than Hillsborough County's \$27,242 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014a). The percent of families with related children under the age of 18 below the poverty line is 22.8%, higher than the state of Florida at 18.4% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014a).

Polk County School District is situated inside Polk County and represents Florida's eighth largest school district, with 94,000 enrolled students, and the nation's thirty-first largest school district (About our district, 2014). The school district student body is more diverse than the county as a whole with 46.2% White, 21.1% Black, and 27.2% Hispanic (About our district, 2014).

The city of Bartow located within Polk County has a per capita income of \$20,515 and a poverty rate of families with children under the age of 18 of 25.9% in 2012 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014a). Bartow may be considered a rural area with an estimated population of 17,996 in 2013 with 377.1 persons per square mile in 2010. In comparison, the city of Lakeland, only 14 miles northwest, with 1,492.6 persons per square mile in 2010 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014c).

Bartow Senior High School has 1,339 students in the 2014-15 school year and has received numerous awards including the school district Video Awards Program, the Shining Star Awards, and a Silver Award (About our district). Moreover, Bartow has earned a B letter grade in the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) from 2009-2013 (Florida Department of Education).

With the flurry of new policies under the title of Zero Tolerance beginning, according to Skiba (2004) in the late 1980s over concerns about drugs, the School Board of Polk County has also adopted a number of Zero Tolerance policies. Zero Tolerance policies are directed towards "violent, disruptive, or inappropriate behavior by students" under Student Conduct 5500 (School Board of Polk County, 2011). Additionally, under student Discipline 5600, Florida law requires students found committing the following infractions grounds for immediate expulsion:

- A. bringing a firearm or weapon, as defined in F.S. Chapter 790, to school, to any school function, or onto any school-sponsored transportation, or possessing a firearm at school; or
- B. making a threat or false report, as defined by F.S. 790.162 and 790.163, involving school or school personnel's property, school transportation, or a school-sponsored activity;

Acts that are considered to be a serious threat to school safety are:

- A. possession of firearms or other weapons
- B. placing, discharging, or throwing an explosive item or noxious substance or making threats to do so
- C. arson
- D. felony assault
- E. violations of serious breaches of conduct in the Board-adopted Student Code of Conduct

(School Board of Polk County, 2004)

Schottelkotte's (2013) initial article reported that a 16-year-old female Bartow High School student, whom she identified by name and home address, had been arrested at school the day before and charged with two felonies. According to Schottelkotte, the girl was charged with "making, possessing or discharging a destructive device," and she also was charged "with possessing or discharging weapons on school grounds" (para. 3). The allegations were that the girl had "detonated a bottle of explosive materials on the school grounds" (para. 1). The article said the principal, Ron Pritchard, had indicated that no one had been hurt and no school property had been damaged (para. 2). The article did not state whether the girl had been charged as an adult, but it did say she had been "transported to the county's Juvenile Assessment Center in Bartow" (para. 13).

The article's headline read "Police: Girl Had Explosive Materials at Bartow High School," and the body of the article said only that the "explosion occurred" (Schottelkotte, 2013, para. 11) not that the girl had caused the explosion. Other information given in the article suggested no one had witnessed her actually causing the explosion. The explosion occurred "about 7 a.m., about the time classes started" (para. 11). Principal Pritchard said he "wasn't standing too far away when it happened. I just heard the pop, and I turned around. I thought it was a firecracker at first" (para. 6). At one point in the article, Schottelkotte wrote that Pritchard "was standing nearby when the student left the drink bottle behind the cafeteria" (para. 5), which could imply active placing of a bottle in an area. However, in a later point in the article, Schottelkotte wrote that, according to Pritchard, "the girl didn't leave the area after the bottle exploded" (para. 8) and quoted Pritchard as saying, "She left it on the ground, and she stayed there. We went over to where she was. She saw that we saw her, so she didn't take off" (para. 9).

The explosion was created using "household materials," which, Schottelkotte (2013) wrote, Bartow police Lt. Gary McLin refused to identify (para. 7) and a "drink bottle" (para. 5), and the explosion occurred "behind the cafeteria, near the lake on the school's east side" (para. 5). Schottelkotte cited Bartow police as reporting the girl "told authorities she was conducting a science experiment...but science teachers said they knew nothing about it. She also said she thought the materials would produce only smoke, not an explosion" (para. 4). Pritchard is quoted as saying, "There weren't a lot of kids there. There were maybe half a dozen kids in the area where she was, and nobody was hurt by it" (para. 12).

The article appeared on page B1 of the print version of the *Ledger*, and the first comment to the online item was posted at 7:35 a.m. by an area resident ["My, my, a science experiment. Sounds educational...."] (Williams, 2013). A second comment, posted at 8:31 a.m., by a person

whose location read only U.S. Army, noted the instructions on how to build the device were “all over FACE BOOK this past week and the dangers involved,” including “taking fingers and in one case a hand off” (Raymond, 2013). Overall, 247 comments were posted between April 23, 2013, and July 2, 2014; several people commented more than once, and “likes” are not counted as comments.

The incident was next reported by WTSP television, a Tampa-based station owned by Gannett Media. A brief item, headlined “Student accused of setting off explosion on campus” and citing “The *Ledger* of Lakeland” (para. 3) as the source of the information, was posted to the station’s Web site on April 23, 2013, at 9:52 a.m. (Michaels, 2013). This item recounted only the basic information included in the *Ledger*’s article and did not include any direct quotes. However, a more extensive newscast (2:26 minutes) appeared on the station’s noon program, and the tone of the reporting changed.

The newscast began with a satellite image of Central Florida filling the screen. Across the top, a small banner read, “Student accused of setting off explosion on campus” (Michaels, 2013). As the female announcer said, “Also in Polk County this afternoon a 16-year-old girl faces felony charges after police say she brought an explosive device to Bartow High School,” the image zoomed in on Bartow. A street map was superimposed over the image, and an arrow pointed to the location of Bartow High. At thirteen seconds into the broadcast, the image then switched to a live report with a reporter standing on a street corner and Bartow High School behind her. A lower-third banner, a strip of text at the bottom of the screen, read “Police: Girl brought explosive device to high school” (all caps); the banner also included, in much smaller letters, upcoming stories: “Deputy attacked,” “Boston Bombings,” “Airline Delays,” and “Headlines: TSA delays allowing small knives on planes.” Intentionally or not, the episode

visually was framed, to use Goffman's (1974) understanding of how we organize and categorize information, in at least two ways. The clearer frame is that of violence, including violence by bombing—the Boston Marathon bombing had taken place just three weeks prior—while the more subtle frame is that of the inconveniences, such as airline delays, caused to law-abiding people by stringent security measures governing items such as “small knives.” Altheide (2002) drew attention to one type of frame, the problem frame, being used over and over by the news media to create a discourse of fear, one that is “pervasive and provides a framework for viewing others and issues alike, for clothing risks and potential danger with a jacket of fear, with one size fits all” (p. 196). In this study, we ask discussants to consider all risks and dangers, explicit and implicit, that are illustrated by this case.

The studio anchor, identified later in the newscast as Ginger Gadsden, introduced reporter Melanie Michaels by asking, “And, Melanie, do we know if she brought the device as some sort of science project that went wrong or was this more malicious?” thus also framing the incident in terms of maturity and motive, both of which are considered part of culpability. In other words, by asking questions the news anchor and the reporter began interrogating the policies and procedures themselves even though neither had yet been mentioned. Michaels cautioned first that “we are certainly gathering information at this hour as this is a developing story,” but then stated “we were able to spend some time with the principal today who shed some light on this.” Then Michaels (2013) addressed Gadsden's question, saying:

The principal truly believes this was *not* a malicious act, this was simply a 16-year-old girl, he says, who wanted to see what happened when household cleaning products, mixed in a bottle, and then created some sort of a ‘boom!’ and blew the cap right off of

the bottle [*sic*]. Now we want to show you a photograph of this young woman. She is 16-year-old Kiera Wilmot.

At this point, 51 seconds into the segment, a photo of Wilmot and two other people, whose full images the station has blurred, appeared on the screen. The photo had been captured from Wilmot's mother's Facebook page and shows the three people, presumably Wilmot, her mother, and her sister, smiling, arms linked, and dressed for some sort of special occasion. At this point, viewers saw that Wilmot is African-American, information that had not been included in either of the print postings (Michaels, 2013).

Michaels explained the reason the station was showing a photo of a 16-year old girl was because she had been charged with felonies. Note that Michaels referred to Wilmot at least once as a "young woman" instead of as a girl, further directing attention to the ambiguous line between child and adult. Michaels then reported that deputies to whom she had spoken had offered an explanation for the arrest. Michaels merged the deputies' explanation into another defense by the principal; in fact, this segment was spoken as though it were one sentence [italics indicate words given extra emphasis by Michaels]:

...and they tell us in a case like this, you can *not* be too careful, especially in this day and age, in this climate in the world. If there's an explosion on school property, they *have* to charge this young woman with a crime, but we should tell you the principal says this is an *exemplary* young woman, a *great* student, from a *great* family, who was simply or possibly *dared* by a friend to mix these household chemicals in a bottle just to see what kind of reaction they would bring.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to present every article written or broadcast produced over the course of the next few months, but Table 1 shows, primarily through headlines, a

general sense of how the local (Lakeland/Tampa) news media reported on the case as it unfolded over the next several months and how the reports spread. Additionally, we provide below a timeline of events to help discussants identify the people and institutions involved in the case, their reported responses to the situation, and their interactions with other people and institutions.

April 22, 2013: 7 a.m. explosion occurs at school, administrator confronts student and calls school resource officer; by 10 a.m. student is arrested and taken to Juvenile Assessment Center.

April 23, 2013: 12:20 a.m. first news reports released by TheLedger.com; 7:35 a.m. first social media response is posted in the form of a comment; 9:52 a.m. brief item posted to WTSP Web site; 12:06 p.m. on-location broadcast during noon WTSP newscast.

May 2013: Early in May, an Oregon woman, Maggie Gilman, begins an online, crowd-sourced (a form of activist social media) petition addressed to State Attorney Jerry Hill demanding that he drop the charges. Almost 196,000 people sign the petition.

May 2013: Also early in May, Will Wolf begins an online, crowd-sourced appeal to collect funds to “help Kiera with her legal bills.” By May 22, 2013, when the appeal expired, the site had collected \$8,427.77 from 295 contributors.

May 7, 2013: After serving a 10-day suspension, Kiera returns to school but at an alternate school designed for students with behavioral problems.

May 15, 2013: The State Attorney’s office announces and it is reported the same day that they will not formally charge “the child,” provided she attends a Department of Juvenile Justice Diversion Program.

May 29, 2013: School Board announces decision to let Kiera return to Bartow High School in the fall.

Teaching Notes

The case study brings into question the role the media plays in presenting an issue and how the presentation and/or media exposure itself may influence decisions including those ethical in nature. Anderson (2007) discussed the influence of media on larger issues, such as school reform, but his argument also applies to media's impacts on a smaller scale including the idea that "language is used to create heroes and villains" (p. 109) or "how spectacle is constructed and the increasingly important role the media play in its construction and deployment" (p. 117). Anderson's point that the media can play a role in constructing and deploying a message is crucial in understanding the influence projected over key players including education administrators, school board officials, law enforcement officials, and policy makers. Both aspects of media discussed by Anderson became reality within our case study. The Polk County School Board consists of seven elected officials who may be influenced by public perception. Additionally, because of the power structure in public education, School Board officials have great influence over decisions made by school administrators.

The media played a role in creating a potential spectacle by using language such as "bomb girl" as opposed to "science experiment gone wrong." The reactions associated with the perception of a "bomb girl" and that of a "science experiment gone wrong" may be dramatically different. Decisions made by administrators cannot be made within a vacuum. Administrators of a public institution must consider that all decisions can and may be scrutinized publicly.

Therefore, the media's role in presenting specific phrases, emphasizing different aspects of the issue, and/or how national media addresses the issue may convey considerable influence over actions taken by local stakeholders. In our case study, media may have played a role in how the Polk County School Board ultimately handled the incident. Consequently, this case study

may raise questions regarding how much influence the media may or should have, along with the ethics of having media outlets frame an issue. Furthermore, there may be ethical implications of the influence national media can have in local decisions made. As the news spread from the Lakeland *Ledger* to national outlets such as *USA Today* and *Huffington Post*, pressure on local officials may have mounted.

Moreover, the undisguised case study also brings to light the ethical dilemmas potentially faced by the principal of Bartow Senior High School, Ron Pritchard. As principal, Mr. Pritchard is expected to maintain the safety and security of all students and staff within the school grounds. Additionally, the Polk County School Board policy (Discipline 5600) and Florida law mandates students who are caught discharging an explosive must be immediately expelled. On the other hand, Mr. Pritchard appeared to be sympathetic of the situation claiming, “She is a good kid and she has never been in trouble before. Ever” and “she made a bad choice. Honestly, I do not think she meant to hurt anyone” (Michaels, 2013, para. 3). Mr. Pritchard may have faced the ethical dilemma between meeting his professional obligations to report the incident and following his personal moral compass. The moral decision is made more complex in that Mr. Pritchard understood the consequences of being accused of discharging an explosive on school premises. Additionally, Mr. Pritchard also faced the ethical implication of utilizing discretion in whether or not to report the incident.

This case study provides graduate students and educational administrators alike the opportunity to discuss not only the complexity of decisions but also the impact of the media especially when dealing with issues of security in public education. Because of the nature of public education (public funding and working with a vulnerable population), issues quickly rise to the level of mass media exposure. Hence, students of educational leadership and those already

in practice, need to be cognizant of how the media plays a role. Students should begin the case study by simply analyzing only the headlines of the various news reports. After viewing only the news headlines, discuss various interpretations of the case. Then, as a class, read the case study as presented in the first part of this article as a guide to exploring the individual articles listed in Table 1. Finally, analyze the case study in light of the dilemmas faced by Principal Pritchard, both in a professional and personal role. As an administrator, any decision made has an ethical component. Therefore, both the understanding the repercussions to decisions (such as expulsion) and the balance between discretion and school security need to be considered. Hence, this study enriches the discussion on the ethics of policy implementation. Similarly, policy makers may benefit from analyzing the following case study to better understand how inflexible policy can limit the discretion of school administrators.

Questions/Activities

Examine the headlines

- Distribute blank sheets of paper to the students. Using Table 1, ask students to write one headline—using marker so the headlines can be viewed by the class—on each piece of paper. In smaller print, include the media source and the date of publication. Post the papers on a wall, using non-permanent tape or other means.
- Invite students to arrange the headlines chronologically and then to discuss what they notice about the way this incident was presented by the media. There are no “right” or “wrong” answers, but some people may comment on it sounding like a story (if so, talk about plot, characters, setting, voice, conflict, resolution, and similar terms).
- After a few minutes of discussion, ask the students to disregard the dates. Are there other groupings of the headlines that could be discussed. Again, there are no “right” or

“wrong” answers, but some people may comment on tone of voice or compare/contrast use of particular words.

- Discuss how these various headlines predispose people, i.e., the general public, to respond in particular ways to reports of incidents about which they have little or no personal knowledge.

Examine the articles

- Divide the class into groups and ask each group to examine a portion of the news reports. The links provided direct viewers to both a written article and to a broadcasted segment, and groups could analyze either or both.
- Ask each group to pay particular attention to the way the media labeled people, things, events, and actions. For instance, Kiera Wilmot variously is called a girl, a child, and a young woman. What other people, things, events, and actions were labeled and how? It may be helpful for the groups to make a list or a chart large enough that the entire class can see the various labels.
- Notice also where information is placed in the news reports. Who or what is mentioned first, in the middle, and last.
- Ask each group to report, in chronological order, their findings, i.e., the group that examined the earliest news items should report first. Have each group post its display, in chronological order, where everyone can see the labels discovered. (Large-sized chart paper can be helpful here.)
- Consider these questions
 1. Who made what decisions at each step? What aspects of the incident and the people involved might they have considered in making their decisions. Think about the decisions

made both by the individual people and the institutional representatives involved the incident.

2. How do these labels and placement within the articles affect your perceptions of the incident? How might these labels and placements have affected the decisions made by the individual people and the individual representatives involved in the incident?
3. How might these perceptions affect the decision-making process? Consider both direct and indirect influences that media reports might have on the decision-making process.
4. What responsibilities does the media have in reporting, framing, and presenting an incident like this?

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Table 1. Through a chronological listing of headlines, this table depicts the ways the incident was reported by the media and how knowledge of the incident spread through the larger community. This listing includes initial reports but does not include all later reports as these numbered in the hundreds.

| Date ¹ | Source (Owned by) | Headline ² (Number of Comments ³) / Link / Brief Summary ⁴ |
|---------------------------|--|---|
| 04/23/13 | TheLedger.com | Police: Girl Had Explosive Materials at Bartow High School (247) http://www.theledger.com/article/20130423/NEWS/304235005/0/search Brief: Recounted basic who/what/when/where/how of incident; apparently based on police report with follow-up quotes |
| 04/23/13 | WTSP-TV (Gannett) | Student accused of setting off explosion on campus http://polkcounty.wtsp.com/news/news/255422-student-accused-setting-explosion-campus Brief: Recounted basic information; family and yearbook photos of Kiera Wilmot; principal reiterates |
| 04/26/13 | Miami <i>NewTimes</i> | Florida Teen Girl Charged With Felony After Science Experiment Goes Bad (1230; 3309 Tweets) http://blogs.miaminewtimes.com/riptide/2013/04/florida_teen_girl_charged_with.php Brief: Cites WTSP report; quotes Polk County School Board statement and spokesperson; links to police report |
| 05/01/13 | WTSP-TV (Gannett) | Teen girl arrested for “science project gone bad” http://polkcounty.wtsp.com/news/news/256402-teen-girl-arrested-science-project-gone-bad Brief: Kiera a good student; Quotes from principal and other students; Includes statement from Polk County Schools |
| 05/01/13 | Miami <i>NewTimes</i> | Florida School Responds to Criticism for Expelling Student Over Science Project: "There Are Consequences to Actions" (561; 3300 FB) http://blogs.miaminewtimes.com/riptide/2013/05/florida_school_responds_to_cri.php Brief: Quotes Polk County spokesperson; cites School Board school conduct code; mentions various blogs and responses to reports |
| 05/01/13 | <i>Huffington Post</i> (AOL) | Kiera Wilmot, 16, Arrested And Expelled For Explosive 'Science Experiment' (4396; 2549 FB) http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/05/01/kiera-wilmot-arrested-science-experiment_n_3194768.html Brief: Compilation of Miami <i>NewTimes</i> , WTSP reports; hat tip to Gawker; first of 87 postings listed |
| 05/02/13 11:24 a.m. | <i>International Business Times</i> – US Edition (IBT Media) | Kiera Wilmot, 16-Year-Old Fla. High School Student, Arrested And Expelled For Explosive 'Science Experiment Gone Bad' http://www.ibtimes.com/search/site/Kiera%2520Wilmot Brief: Compilation of Miami <i>NewTimes</i> , TheLedger.com, WTSP reports |
| 05/02/13 3:31 p.m. | <i>International Business Times</i> – US Edition (IBT Media) | Kiera Wilmot Expelled: Scientists, Teachers Outraged By Harsh Punishment For Teen’s Experiment Accident http://www.ibtimes.com/kiera-wilmot-expelled-scientists-teachers-outraged-harsh-punishment-teens-experiment-accident Brief: Scientists tweeting and blogging in response to incident and actions; quotes safety advisor for National Science Teachers Association and other scientists; suggests racial bias element |
| 05/02/13 7:44 p.m. | <i>USA Today</i> (Gannett) | Florida teen arrested, expelled over science ‘blast’ (162; 2361 FB) http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2013/05/02/florida-student-arrested-science-experiment-blast/2130381/ Brief: Recounts incident; cites TheLedger.com, WTSP, Miami <i>NewTimes</i> ; quotes |

| | | |
|--------------------------|-------------------------|--|
| | | Princeton author of <i>Police in the Hallways</i> |
| 05/05/13 | WFLA (Media General) | Experiment results in expulsion, felony charges for Bartow girl http://www.wfla.com/story/22165949/bartow-student-conductin Brief: Associated Press report; erroneously says incident took place April 29; recounts basic incident, petition; cites Miami's <i>News Times</i> (instead of Miami <i>NewTimes</i>) |
| 05/07/13 5:16 a.m. | WTSP-TV (Gannett) | Petition to help "Bartow Bomb" student gets thousands of signatures http://polkcounty.wtsp.com/news/news/276722-petition-help-bartow-bomb-student-gets-thousands-signatures Brief: Notes headlines in Huffington Post and Slate; quotes ACLU; reports Kiera now at alternative school for students with behavior problems; notes petition(s) plural but cites and links only to Change.org |
| 05/07/13 3:28 p.m. | WTSP-TV (Gannett) | Bartow bottle bomb girl receives support http://polkcounty.wtsp.com/news/news/278702-bartow-bottle-bomb-girl-receives-support Brief: Similar to previous report; note what has changed |
| 05/09/13 | WTSP-TV (Gannett) | New info and new support for Bartow bomb girl http://polkcounty.wtsp.com/news/news/282952-new-info-and-new-support-bartow-bomb-girl Brief: Kiera plays musical instrument and dances; quotes from family attorney, church-based protest group, science professor (Kiera's tutor), and State Attorney's Office |
| 05/10/13 | WTSP-TV (Gannett) | Outside attorney weighs in on Kiera Wilmot case http://polkcounty.wtsp.com/news/news/284842-outside-attorney-weighs-kiera-wilmot-case Brief: Outside attorney has handled similar situations; explains strategies used by family lawyer, State Attorney's options; discusses public opinion; regardless of State Attorney's actions, School Board also takes action |
| 05/15/13 2:37 p.m. | WTSP-TV (Gannett) | "Bartow Bomb" student will not face criminal charges http://polkcounty.wtsp.com/news/news/292082-bartow-bomb-student-will-not-face-criminal-charges Brief: State's Attorney announces decision; link to statement; diversionary program |
| 05/15/13 9:10 p.m. | WTSP-TV (Gannett) | Charges to be dropped against Bartow "bottle bomb" student http://polkcounty.wtsp.com/news/news/292522-charges-be-dropped-against-bartow-bottle-bomb-student Brief: State's Attorney's decision reported; quotes from family lawyer, science professor tutor; statement from school officials |
| 05/17/13 | WTSP-TV (Gannett) | Bartow Bomb Case: Kiera Wilmot speaks out http://polkcounty.wtsp.com/news/news/293412-bartow-bomb-case-kiera-wilmot-speaks-out Brief: Phone conference with Kiera; peer pressure factor; former NASA engineer Homer Hickam (<i>Rocket Boys</i>) giving scholarship; quotes Kiera, Hickam, mother |
| 05/22/13 | WTSP-TV (Gannett) | Kiera Wilmot: I've been called a "terrorist" http://polkcounty.wtsp.com/news/news/297482-kiera-wilmot-ive-been-called-terrorist Brief: News conference with Kiera, family, lawyer |
| 05/29/13 | WTSP-TV (Gannett) | "Bottle bomb" student will return to Bartow High http://polkcounty.wtsp.com/news/news/307922-bottle-bomb-student-will-return-bartow-high |

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| | | Brief: Family lawyer announces school board’s decision; states next step is clearing police records |
| 07/03/13 | WAAY-TV (Southern Broadcast Corporation of Sarasota) ABC Affiliate | Florida teen spends week at Space Camp after making national news http://www.waaytv.com/news/local/florida-teen-spends-week-at-space-camp-after-making-national/article_f0ec4f32-e45a-11e2-a333-001a4bcf6878.html Brief: Huntsville, Alabama, TV station reporting; recounts incident, arrest, expulsion, petitions, readmission to school; quotes Kiera and scientist who provided scholarship |
| 07/05/13 | WTSP-TV (Gannett) | Bartow ‘bottle bomb’ teen goes to Space Camp http://polkcounty.wtsp.com/news/news/377022-bartow-bottle-bomb-teen-goes-space-camp Brief: Rebroadcast WAAY report (refers to “WAAY partners”) |
| 03/31/14 7:00 p.m. | WTSP-TV (Gannett) | Black leaders alarmed by youth arrest rate http://www.wtsp.com/story/news/local/hillsboroughcounty/2014/03/31/black-youth-arrests-beulah-baptist-church/7142741/ Brief: Kiera speaks at Pastors’ Unity for Youth Dinner; Southern Poverty Law Center statistics cited; quotes from Kiera and local pastor |
| 03/31/14 | <i>Tampa Bay Times</i> (Poynter) | Citing abuse, advocates to seek changes in zero-tolerance policies http://www.tampabay.com/news/education/k12/citing-abuse-advocates-take-on-changing-school-zero-tolerance-policies/2172825 Brief: Southern Poverty Law Center announces Tallahassee trip during dinner honoring Kiera Wilmot; quotes from SPLC and Dream Defenders |
| 04/01/14 3:39 a.m. | WTSP-TV (Gannett) | Black leaders alarmed by youth arrest rate http://hillsboroughcounty.wtsp.com/news/news/810392-black-leaders-alarmed-youth-arrest-rate Brief: Kiera speaks at Pastors’ Unity for Youth Dinner; Southern Poverty Law Center statistics cited; quotes from Kiera and local pastor; note change in lead sentence from earlier report |
| 06/03/14 | WTSP-TV (Gannett) | Girl expelled over science project graduates http://www.wtsp.com/story/news/education/2014/06/03/girl-expelled-over-science-project-graduates/9928063/ Brief: Kiera and sister graduate from Bartow High; both plan to attend Florida Polytechnic University; Kiera to major in mechanical and robotic engineering; quotes from Kiera and mother |

¹The televised report times generally were an hour or more after the written item had been posted. In some cases, the televised report differed from the written item. These briefs reference the written reports.

²Capitalization of the headlines in this table reflects the style used by each source.

³The number of comments is noted when the information was still available. In many cases, the links to comments were not available or had been removed by the media outlet. If Facebook, Twitter, and other social media figures were available, the outlet with the highest number was noted.

⁴The brief summary is based on the written information accessed online.

APPENDIX A (List of Resources)**Commentaries:**

Hayes, C., & Resnikoff, N. (2013, May 2). All in with Chris Hayes: Florida teen faces felony charges for science experiment. *MSNBC*. Retrieved from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rW6Lqf7HxNU>

Marston, G. (2013, May 12). Explosion: Middle Course for Student. *Lakeland Ledger*. Retrieved from <http://www.theledger.com/article/20130512/COLUMNISTS0308/130519824/0/search>

Crowdsourcing sites:

Gilman, M. (2013, May). Drop charges against Kiera Wilmot. *Change.org*. Retrieved from <http://www.change.org/p/state-attorney-jerry-hill-drop-charges-against-kiera-wilmot>

Wolf, W. (2013, May). Help Kiera with her legal bills – she was expelled and arrested for felony after a harmless science mistake. *Tilt.com*. Retrieved from <https://www.tilt.com/campaigns/help-keira-with-her-legal-bills-she-was-expelled-and-charged-with-felony-after-a-harmless-science-mistake/description>

Documents:

Hill, J. (2013). Statement regarding resolution of case involving incident at Bartow High School on April 22, 2013. Office of the State Attorney, Tenth Judicial Circuit. Retrieved from http://archive.wtsp.com/assetpool/documents/130515034006_Statement%205-15-2013.pdf

Police report. Retrieved from <http://www.scribd.com/doc/138927259/Wilmot-Arrest>

Society of Professional Journalists. (2014). *Code of ethics*. Retrieved from <http://www.spj.org/ethicscode.asp>