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Parents Camp Out To Protest School Closing

Mini-Tent City Dubbed 'O'Malleyville'

POSTED: 3:30 pm EDT June 11, 2005

BOSTON -- Parents angry that the Boston archdiocese abruptly locked their kids out of school before graduation ceremonies have started a camp-out in a city square across from the school in protest.

About 50 people stayed in the 10 tents set up Friday night in Oak Square, across from Our Lady of Presentation School. The Boston archdiocese closed the school Wednesday, two days ahead of schedule.

Protesters already had permits to use the square over the coming week to demonstrate against the archdiocese's plans to shut the school. They decided to erect tents in the square in a show of strength and solidarity.

"The intent would be to show we are a school in exile," said Fiona O'Brien, a parent of twin 7-year-old girls at the school.

Kimberly Dacy-Smith, a mother of two children at the school, said the vigil aims to show church leaders, "that they can't scatter us, they can't destroy our faith."

Parents have dubbed the mini-tent city, "O'Malleyville," after Archbishop Sean O'Malley, who decided to change the locks on the school on Wednesday night.

Parents held their own graduation for kindergartners on Thursday at Oak Square. Mayor Thomas Menino, who blasted O'Malley's decision, allowed the school to use Faneuil Hall for graduation for older students Friday.

The archdiocese closed the school ahead of schedule after hearing reports that protesters intended to begin an occupation of the school building as early as Thursday.

Similar sit-ins have prevented the archdiocese from closing several churches. About 80 of 357 parishes are scheduled to close as part of the church's reconfiguration.

Terry Donilon, a spokesman for the archdiocese, has said O'Malley shut down the school because he didn't want children caught in the middle of an occupation attempt. Donilon didn't immediately return a message on Saturday.

As temperatures reached into the 90s Saturday, children played and read in the square as their parents said they were prepared to stay there all week.

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the square as their parents said they were prepared to stay there all week.

Parents had offered to buy the school building and start a new school, as well as after school and education programs, but the archdiocese never put the property on the market and said it is still deciding what to do with it.

Dacy-Smith said the building should be a community center, and the camp-out shows residents' determination to battle for what they think is right.

"We will fight anybody," Dacy-Smith said. "We have, and we will."

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