**‘They thought it was a bomb’: 9th-grader arrested after bringing a home-built clock to school**

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**Why teen inventor Ahmed Mohamed got arrested**

Fourteen-year-old Ahmed Mohamed just wanted to get noticed by his teachers.

Instead, he got arrested.

In an incident that has raised allegations of racism and made a Texas school district the target of online outrage, the ninth-grader was pulled out of school in handcuffs after a digital clock he built himself was mistaken for a bomb.

On Wednesday, Irving Police Chief Larry Boyd said that Mohamed would not be charged with any wrongdoing.

“We have no evidence to support that there was an intention to create alarm or cause people to be concerned,” Boyd said during a news conference after news of Mohamed’s arrest prompted a national outcry.

And the story of Mohamed’s arrest has made its way across the Internet and all the way to the White House.

“I’m the person who built a clock and got in a lot of trouble for it,” the jittery and smiling ninth-grader said during a press conference outside of his home after his arrest became national news.

Messages of support from President Obama, Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg, Democratic presidential hopeful and former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton have buoyed the young man. He said on Wednesday evening that he was grateful for the support for his “movement” and he hoped to attend MIT.

Mohamed said it felt “outstanding” to receive so much support.

“I never thought it would get this far,” he added.

Mohamed, a self-assured kid with thick-framed glasses and a serious expression, had just started at MacArthur High School a few weeks ago. The Irving, Tex., ninth-grader has a talent for tinkering — he constructs his own radios and once built a Bluetooth speaker as a gift for his friend — and he wanted to show his new teachers what he could do. So on Sunday night, he quickly put together a homemade digital clock (“just something small,” as he casually put it to the [Dallas Morning News](http://www.dallasnews.com/news/community-news/northwest-dallas-county/headlines/20150915-irving-ninth-grader-arrested-after-taking-homemade-clock-to-school.ece): a circuit board and power supply connected to a digital display) and proudly offered it to his engineering teacher the next day.

But the teacher looked wary.

“He was like, ‘That’s really nice,’” Mohamed told the [Dallas Morning News](http://www.dallasnews.com/news/community-news/northwest-dallas-county/headlines/20150915-irving-ninth-grader-arrested-after-taking-homemade-clock-to-school.ece). “‘I would advise you not to show any other teachers.’”

During English class, the clock beeped, annoying his teacher. When he brought the device up to her afterward, she told him “it looks like a bomb,” according to Mohamed.

“I told her, ‘It doesn’t look like a bomb to me,'” he told the [Dallas Morning News](http://www.dallasnews.com/news/community-news/northwest-dallas-county/headlines/20150915-irving-ninth-grader-arrested-after-taking-homemade-clock-to-school.ece).

But the English teacher kept the clock, and during sixth period, Mohamed was pulled out of class by the principal and a police officer. They took him to a room where four other officers were waiting. When he entered, one officer leaned back in his chair and said, “That’s who I thought it was,” Mohamed told [MSNBC](http://on.msnbc.com/1iQma5w).

“They interrogated me and searched through my stuff and took my tablet and my invention,” the teen said. “They were like, ‘So you tried to make a bomb?’ I told them no, I was trying to make a clock.”

But his questioner responded, “It looks like a movie bomb to me.”

Mohamed said that he was taken to police headquarters, handcuffed and fingerprinted.

During questioning, officers repeatedly brought up his last name, Mohamed said. When he tried to call his father, Mohamed said he was told he couldn’t speak to his parents until after the interrogation was over.

“I really don’t think it’s fair because I brought something to school that wasn’t a threat to anyone,” Mohamed told [NBC](http://www.nbcdfw.com/news/local/Irving-Student-Says-Hes-Falsely-Accused-of-Making-a-Hoax-Bomb-327794401.html). “I didn’t do anything wrong. I just showed my teachers something, and I end up being arrested later that day.”

Asked about why Mohamed was not permitted to call his parents while being questioned by police, Irving chief Boyd said he did “not have answers to your specific question” about the allegation.

In a statement to the TV station, Irving Independent School District spokeswoman Lesley Weaver declined to discuss the case, though she confirmed that a MacArthur High School student was arrested on campus.

“We always ask our students and staff to immediately report if they observe any suspicious items and/or suspicious behavior,” she wrote. “If something is out of the ordinary, the information should be reported immediately to a school administrator and/or the police so it can be addressed right away. We will always take necessary precautions to protect our students and keep our school community as safe as possible.”

NBC-DFW reported that a police report released Tuesday cites a “hoax bomb” incident, listing three MacArthur High teachers as complainants against Mohamed.

Irving Police Officer James McLellan told the TV station that school officials were worried about the device.

“Clearly, there were disassembled clock parts in there, but he offered no more explanation than that,” McLellan said. “A lot of these details that the family and he have provided to you were not shared with us yesterday. He was very much less than forthcoming.”
McLellan told the [Dallas Morning News](http://www.dallasnews.com/news/community-news/northwest-dallas-county/headlines/20150915-irving-ninth-grader-arrested-after-taking-homemade-clock-to-school.ece) that Mohamed never claimed the device was anything other than a clock. But school staff and police officers remained suspicious.

“It could reasonably be mistaken as a device if left in a bathroom or under a car,” McLellan said. “The concern was, what was this thing built for? Do we take him into custody?”

Mohamed’s family said that the teen has been suspended from school for three days.

Speaking to the [Dallas Morning News](http://www.dallasnews.com/news/community-news/northwest-dallas-county/headlines/20150915-irving-ninth-grader-arrested-after-taking-homemade-clock-to-school.ece) from his Irving home, Ahmed’s father, Mohamed Elhassan Mohamed, blamed the incident on Islamophobia.

“He just wants to invent good things for mankind,” said the elder Mohamed, who immigrated from Sudan. “But because his name is Mohamed and because of Sept. 11, I think my son got mistreated.”

On Wednesday evening at a press conference, Mohamed said that his son was “mistreated” in front of his classmates and teachers.

“That is not America. That is not us,” he said.

That sentiment has rippled out in their community. Muram Ibrahim, a 15-year-old cousin of Mohamed’s who was part of his middle school robotics team, said Ahmed’s arrest makes her feel differently about going to school in Irving.

“It just shocked me that people could do this to him. He’s a 14-year-old boy, and he’s a genius,” she told The Washington Post, recalling how her teammates used to call her younger cousin over whenever they needed help.

“I thought there’s a lot of diversity at Irving [Independent School District], and I thought that it was different from other school districts,” she said. “But I was wrong, and it makes me really sad that I’m wrong.”

The Council on American-Islamic Relations said it will be looking into the case. Attorneys for the organization, along with the Mohameds, told local TV station WFAA they plan to meet with the MacArthur High School principal and the Irving police chief on Wednesday afternoon.

“I think this wouldn’t even be a question if his name wasn’t Ahmed Mohamed,” Alia Salem, CAIR’s executive director for the Dallas-Fort Worth region, told WFAA.

Meanwhile, people online and off have rallied to the teenager’s cause. By early Wednesday morning, the hashtags #IstandwithAhmed and #helpAhmedmake were trending on Twitter.

Society is teaching a young mind that no matter what he goes to accomplish, people will only see the color of his skin

But the school district and Irving officials remained steadfast that Mohamed’s arrest was a reasonable attempt to investigate a possible threat.

“I do not fault the school or the police for looking into what they saw as a potential threat,” said Irving Mayor Beth Van Duyne in a statement Wednesday.

“As a parent, I agree that if this happened to my child I would be very upset,” she added. “It is my sincere desire that Irving ISD students are encouraged to use their creativity, develop innovations and explore their interests in a manner that fosters higher learning.

“Hopefully, we can all learn from this week’s events and the student, who has obvious gifts, will not feel at all discouraged from pursuing his talent in electronics and engineering,” Van Duyne continued.

Ibrahim told The Post that she helped organize a protest at Irving schools, encouraging students to bring clocks to school in a show of solidarity.

As for Ahmed — he’s appreciative and a little astonished by all the attention, Ibrahim said. And still wrestling with the memory of handcuffs encircling his thin, 14-year-old wrists.

“I felt like I was a criminal, I felt like I was a terrorist,” he said in an interview on [MSNBC](http://on.msnbc.com/1iQma5w) Wednesday. “I felt like all the names I was called.”

“What do you mean, all the names you were called?” the interviewer, Chris Hayes, asked.

“In middle school I was called a terrorist, called a bomb maker, just because of my race and religion,” he said, his expression sober.

But he and his parents are heartened by the response from outside their community.

“What can I say? I’m grateful to the United States of America,” his father said on Wednesday. “What’s happening is touching the hearts of everybody who has a child. And that is America.”