

New drill: 'Lancer lockdown'

By MERISSA MASTROPIERO
The Tattoo

When Bristol Eastern High School students heard "Lancer Lockdown" over the intercom last Monday, they scrambled into classrooms and hunkered down.

The first test of the new lockdown, intended to secure the school in case someone starts shooting, saw teachers frantically herd students out of hallways and, once the corridors were cleared, lock doors, shut off lights and take attendance.

Then students and teachers were instructed to lie low and wait.

"We need to fine tune some things," said Principal V. Everett Lyons. "Though all the students took it seriously, we need to make sure that everyone knows what to do — some very minor stuff."

"This is a safe school," Lyons said. But, he said, "No matter how safe you are, you need a backup plan. We can't get into the attitude 'it can't happen here.'"

Lyons said he wanted to wait until the hysteria from the Colorado school massacre died down a bit before telling teachers, students and parents about the lockdown plan. They were all informed recently.

Alexandra Mikan, an English teacher at Eastern, said the plan "may not be fool-proof," but it's best to have something ready. "I think having a plan will give people a direction to go in," she said.

In a letter to parents, Lyons said school administrators "do not perceive a threat at present" but want the plan to help minimize risks.

He said a key role for parents and students "is to keep us informed of situations which may lead to a more serious outburst. Please do not assume that 'somebody at school should know about this' and do nothing."

Lyons said a dress code barring hats, bandannas, heavy sweaters and sweatshirts, jackets and coats will be strictly enforced.

The school is also taking precautions against visitors.

After 8 a.m., all doors except the main entrance will be locked from the outside and visitors must stop at the office to get an identification badge.

If an emergency evacuation of Eastern is ever necessary, said Lyons, students and parents have been told to head to nearby Stafford School.

To bolster security, Lyons said he also wants to replace many aging doors. They should lock when they swing shut, he said, but many now don't close properly.

"The art doors don't lock from the inside," said Wendy Thornley, an art teacher at Eastern. "I herded my students into the closet. When we got out we'd been locked in. We had to flag down a janitor in the hallway to get out."

"It's a good plan," Thornley added, "but I

hope we never have to use it."

More drills are planned soon.

At a meeting with Lyons recently, Eastern staff members suggested that classrooms should have a second phone installed for emergencies, since the normal line to the office is often busy.

Lyons said they could install another intercom phone. But he said the school's five two-way radios are sufficient.

Sharon Poupart, a guidance counselor at Eastern, said the plan sounds good. Lyons, she said, is "being pro-active. He is not going overboard."

Poupart said that on the first day back at school after the shootings at Columbine High School, "I saw many kids that were nervous and wanted to talk about Littleton."

In addition to cracking down and making plans, Lyons is also trying to soften the school environment.

To help draw students together, more activities are planned for the upcoming year that would include the interests of more social groups, he said.

During an address to the school over the intercom recently, Lyons said, "All students must be welcomed. We need to refrain from spiteful, hurtful behaviors and comments. We all have to learn to get along together. We must demand respect for every student."

Tattoo staff writers Joe Wilbur and Jessica Norton contributed to this article.

Killer friendship

By AMANDA LEHMERT and JESSICA MAJERUS
The Tattoo

In a town of 25,000 people, no one suspects the kid she sits next to in class may someday be a mass murderer.

At least Abi Tenebaum and Jessica Sapel never thought Eric Harris — now one of the infamous Columbine High shooters — would cause such terror and devastation.

Harris, who with his friend Dylan Klebold gunned down a dozen fellow students and a teacher before killing themselves in an April 20 attack at their high school in Littleton, Colo., was a former middle school classmate of Tenebaum and Sapel's in Plattsburgh, N.Y.

Tenebaum, a 17-year-old senior at Mayo High School in Rochester, Minn. and Sapel, an 18-year-old senior in Plattsburgh, knew Harris when his family lived on the local Air Force base.

Plattsburgh, on the western shore of Lake Champlain in the northernmost part of New York, is less than 25 miles from the Canadian border.

Harris was a "normal sixth grader," Tenebaum said, "not one of the outcasts."

Sapel called Harris a "good kid" and "sweet." He "never struck me as someone who would do this," she said.

Although there have been reports that Harris and Klebold chose the date because it was Hitler's birthday and singled out a black student and athletes as victims for their savage attack, both teenagers said when Harris lived in Plattsburgh he never showed signs of any hatred toward those groups.

According to Tenebaum, Harris dated a Jewish girl in Plattsburgh, Sarah Davis.

Davis and Harris apparently remained friends after Harris left town, exchanging messages via e-mail.

Contacted recently in Plattsburgh, Davis didn't want to talk about Harris.

"It's been difficult," she said. Sapel said she didn't believe the news that Harris had targeted a black student.

Harris's two best friends in Plattsburgh were an Asian student and a black student, Sapel

said. Harris was also an active athlete who played Little League.

Tenebaum said that Harris associated with "preps," but said he wasn't "an annoying prick."

Sapel can't imagine how this gentle middle schooler turned into a trench coat toting criminal, but she thinks Harris began having problems after his family moved to Colorado,

Colorado shooter Eric Harris' old middle school classmates remember a normal kid, not an outcast

during their seventh grade year.

"It didn't happen to him here (in Plattsburgh)," Sapel said. "None of us can imagine what happened."

In Plattsburgh, Harris was a "nice, normal kid" who wore "jeans, tee shirts, and sweat shirts," Sapel said.

If any group of students in the country have stopped to think twice about the massacre in Columbine, it's the students of Plattsburgh.

When she heard from a local newspaper reporter about Harris' role in the killings, Sapel said, her mouth just dropped. She said she was amazed that "something like this could happen to someone I know."

At first, Sapel said, getting attention from the national media who came to the town to talk about the incident, "was kinda exciting."

But the attention soon became too much.

Sapel said she felt like telling the media to "go away."

"We don't want to talk about this. It isn't a news story, it's a tragedy," she said.

Now Sapel said teenagers in her town are wondering what might have happened "if [Harris] had stayed here" instead of moving to Colorado just five years ago.

"We're glad it didn't happen to us," said Sapel. "It could have been us."

Could new safety plan be dangerous?

By JOE WILBUR, HILA YOSAFI, MERISSA MASTROPIERO and AMANDA LEHMERT
The Tattoo

Designed to make Bristol Eastern High School safer, the "Lancer Lockdown" could put students and teachers at greater risk, some students said.

"Putting us all in one place, or in clusters, is dangerous. The last thing we want to do is get into groups for the killers," said Carolyn Webster, an Eastern sophomore.

"It's going to provoke maniacs," said Dave Carros, a senior at Bristol Eastern.

Many teachers said that while the school has to do something, the lockdowns are pointless and depressing.

"It saddens me," said Michael Traverso, a social studies teacher at Eastern, "that I've been here 30 years and this is what we've come to — hiding the kids in the corners and locking the doors."

Jack Winters, a history teacher at Central, said the plan encourages the "mentality" of school violence. "Now, they think it will happen because you practice the drill," he said.

The lockdown plan — and drills — are only for Bristol Eastern. At Bristol Central, administrators are taking a more relaxed approach, locking entrances and

'If you hide, you're trapping yourself' — Alex Tie, freshman at Bristol Central

requiring guests to carry passes.

"I felt safe at school," said Eastern sophomore Sarah McDonald, "but this lockdown thing makes students paranoid, and, if someone's going to do something, a lockdown isn't going to help."

"Frankly, if they were going to kill us all, I don't think it would stop them," said Chris Bonis, an Eastern junior.

Gina Gallo, a sophomore at Central, said she thinks people are overreacting.

"I think it's pointless," said Eastern sophomore Chris Wright. "There is really no threat to our school."

But Traverso said something has to be done.

Administrators are "doing the best that anyone could do, but if someone's determined, there's nothing you can do," Traverso said.

"It's very sad that it's come to this," said Pasquale DiMatteo, the Italian teacher at Eastern, "but I have my instructions and it's better safe than sorry, I guess."

Richard Ladisky, an accounting teacher at Eastern, said, "Every school has to have a well-thought-out plan to protect everybody."

"There'll always be panic if something happens," Ladisky said, "but the majority will follow the plan."

Sandy O'Keefe, a math teacher at Central, said she doesn't think the drill is a bad idea.

"It allows you to work out the problems," O'Keefe said.

"It's the least administrators can do without the teachers having to arm themselves," said Austin Ouellette, an Eastern junior. "It's all safety measures. It needs to be done."

According to Eastern Assistant Principal Boyd Biondino, the plan isn't anything new.

"We've always had an intruder alert system," said Biondino, "and now we're just calling it a 'Lancer Lockdown.' It's been in place for years, as a pro-active measure. This isn't in reaction to anything."

Some students aren't so sure.

"It's all about Colorado," said Thea Denslow, an Eastern junior. "They have to show that they're doing something. But it's not going



Amanda Lehmert / The Tattoo

Schools are locking doors to outsiders, sometimes with a padlock and chain, as on this door at Bristol Central High School.

to work. Even if the teachers stay sane and keep to the plan if anything happens, it won't help anything."

"It won't work," said Brian Austin, an Eastern junior. "If you hear gunshots, you aren't going to think rationally. You certainly aren't going to lock yourself in a classroom."

"I don't think they're taking that into account," he said. If the attackers are students, some said, they'll already know the plan and will be able to use it to their advantage.

Fernando Gonzalez, a junior at Eastern, said, "I think it's kinda tough how the teachers talk about putting their lives in risk for their students. When the action happens, they're not gonna do s***."

Don Nannoum, a sophomore at Central, said locking kids in classrooms would only help an attacker.

"If you hide, you're trapping yourself," said Alex Tie, a freshman at Central.

"I wouldn't lock myself up," said Bryan Rivard, an Eastern junior. "If I hear gunshots in the hallway, I run like hell."

Bristol chief: More cops not the answer

By JOE WILBUR
The Tattoo

More cops in city schools isn't the solution to concerns about potential violence, said Bristol Police Chief John DiVenere.

"We don't need police in the schools every day in Bristol," he said, "that's not the answer."

But DiVenere said his department is working with local schools to improve security.

"We've always had officers in the school, and youth officers working with students, but we don't feel that it solves anything to have uniformed officers there every day," the chief said.

DiVenere said police have been working with the board of education for weeks to "come to a plan to make everyone feel safer, to increase security."

DiVenere said there may be increased security outside the schools, which he said could be a deterrent.

Police met recently with teachers and administrators from Bristol high schools, middle schools and elementary schools, the chief said.

According to DiVenere, more meetings are in the works. Police will work with the schools until "we can all feel safe and students can learn and feel safe in their schools," DiVenere said.

At a recent meeting between administrators and faculty, several teachers said they'd like to see a greater police presence at the school.

Eastern Principal V. Everett Lyons said that he's working with DiVenere on getting money for more police.

While some students said increased security adds anxiety to an already tense situation, others said they were comforted by the idea of police presence in school.

Katie Stinchon, a freshman at Bristol Central High School, said, "More police officers is a good idea."

"We should have more security," said Jack Winters, a history teacher at Central. "There should be security here 24 hours a day." But Winters said, "Bristol won't do anything until something happens."

"I think they should have police officers here on school grounds all the time," said Fernando Gonzalez, a junior at Eastern.

Gonzalez said there should be "at least two to three cops in each school."

But some questioned the wisdom of adding more police.

"I feel safe at school usually," said Amy Wheelock, a senior at Eastern, "but increasing security and having cops here would make me paranoid. It's more a threat than anything—the idea makes me feel unsafe."

Michael Traverso, a social studies teacher at Bristol Eastern, said, "You can't turn the school into a prison. Too much of that and it ceases to be a learning environment, a place where people feel safe." Jennifer Swinsick, a Central sophomore, said having cops in school would make her "feel like we're not being trusted."

Don Nannoum, a sophomore at Central, said, "Did they make a difference in the Columbine High School shooting? What difference would they make here?"

Tattoo staff writers Hila Yosafi, Merissa Mastropiero and Amanda Lehmert contributed to this story.

St. Paul plans video monitor, buzzer system

By COURTNEY PENDLETON
The Tattoo

St. Paul Catholic High School is locking its doors.

A new school security plan at St. Paul has all the entrances, except for the front door, locked after 7:45 a.m.

Next year there will be a buzzer system and video monitor at the front door, said Joseph Bischof, the school's development director and incoming principal.

Joseph Bound, the interim principal, said although a school crisis plan has been in the works for a month, the Colorado shootings prompted the new locking policy.

The Bristol Police Department sent out information on how to make hallways safer, Bound said.

Teachers at St. Paul must now keep their classroom doors locked at all times.

Junior Erin Carvey said "It's a good idea as long as it doesn't get out of control."

But some students think it's

already out of control.

"It's mass panic and it will die down soon," said senior Heather McCarron. "I just don't like being locked up like an animal."

Another senior, who spoke on the condition that his name not be used, said he had been asked to leave the school until he received a note from a psychologist saying that he was mentally fit to return to St. Paul.

The boy wears a trench coat to school and last year wrote a macabre poem in English class.

"I think they're just covering themselves," he said. "If they were really afraid they could expel me."

The administration declined comment on the student's statement.

Junior Jess Mendes said, "It doesn't make me feel any safer, but then I never felt threatened."

Richard Cahill, the dean of discipline, said, "A lot of people think it couldn't happen here, but I'll bet the people in Colorado said the same thing."

What's up? The Tattoo

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Next Monday, by the way, don't miss a special issue of *The Tattoo* devoted exclusively to Balloons Over Bristol.

Appearing occasional Mondays, *The Tattoo* is produced under the supervision of Bristol Press reporters Jackie Majerus and Steve Collins. Direct questions or comments to them at 589-5316 or via e-mail at SteveJackie@prodigy.net

The *Tattoo* can be found on the web at:

http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/Majerus_Collins

If you found this page interesting, check the web site for *The Tattoo*'s initial reaction page to the Colorado massacre, an April 26 special issue with eight pieces probing the shooting's aftermath.