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## Gun case spurs safety call

### Sacramento City officials, community to air concerns over recent incidents.

**By Todd Milbourn and Terri Hardy - Bee Staff Writers**  
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Sacramento City Unified School District officials announced Friday they will consider using metal detectors, gun-sniffing dogs and other safety measures to prevent the kind of tragedy that police say nearly struck C.K. McClatchy High School a day earlier.

Board President Manny Hernandez said that an alleged plot targeting two students that authorities stopped Thursday morning, and other recent cases of school violence, underscore the need for bold steps to protect students' safety at schools throughout the district.

"If there is a genuine threat out there we have to adapt," Hernandez said. "And there is."

Security already was beefed up at McClatchy on Friday morning. Students arrived to see four uniformed officers near the front door facing Freeport Boulevard.

Police had arrested two teenage boys 24 hours earlier at a nearby light-rail station, alleging they were plotting to shoot two McClatchy girls who were in a fight with the suspects' friends.

Police later arrested two other teens -- a boy and a girl -- in the incident.

As investigators tried to figure what was behind the incident, school officials and community leaders said it should serve as a platform to discuss school violence.

City Councilman Rob Fong, a former school board president, said he was organizing a community forum for McClatchy parents and students.

The 2,400-student Land Park school, lauded as one of the city's flagship schools for its Humanities and International Studies Program (HISP), has endured several high-profile acts of gun violence this year.

"This issue of kids with guns, it's hard to get over that," Fong said. "Parents have every reason to be concerned about the safety of their children when they're at school -- I know I am."

Board members said they would review district policies to make sure parents and students are quickly notified when there is a threat.

Police apprehended the first two suspects at about 8:30 a.m., yet the school didn't send a message alerting parents until about 5 p.m., hours after classes ended.

"I'm very concerned about the timeliness of that message," said school board member Rick Jennings. "For parents, communication is critical."

McClatchy Principal Cynthia Clark said the message wasn't sent out sooner because police believed they had the suspects in custody and the endangered girls were being protected. "We evaluated the threat and determined everything was under control," Clark said.

Circumstances changed around 3:30 p.m., Clark said, when the school learned other conspirators might be involved. It was then that Clark -- after consulting with Associate Superintendent Susan Miller and police -- decided to alert parents through an automated telephone call.

"Everything will always be second-guessed," Clark said Friday. "But we wanted to make sure that we had enough information to be accurate. The last thing we want to do is raise the anxiety level unnecessarily."

Superintendent Maggie Mejia said she trusts that Clark and those involved in the decision-making handled the matter as well as possible.

However, "we may need to be thinking about sending out the limited facts when you get them, instead of trying to wait until you have all of it," Mejia said.

The superintendent said she would also take steps to ensure that she learns of potential threats in a more timely fashion. She didn't know about Thursday's incident until about 1 p.m. -- 4 1/2 hours after the initial arrests.

"My question today was why didn't I hear sooner? And I was assured that these kids were apprehended, in custody and the situation was in control," she said.

Another matter up for discussion is whether McClatchy should have gone into an immediate lockdown when authorities learned armed teenagers allegedly intended to go on campus with pictures of students they were targeting.

They were stopped in their tracks at the light-rail station when a sheriff's deputy stopped them for not paying their fare and being truant, police said.

When the deputy found the gun, ammunition and pictures, he notified the school's resource officer, who recognized the students' pictures and warned the school, police said.

Hernandez said Thursday that McClatchy should have closed the school as soon as officials learned of the alleged plot.

District policy states that schools are to be locked down when there is an "imminent threat."

But the policy does not define what constitutes an imminent threat when the threat is off-campus, said Maria Lopez, a district spokeswoman. In those cases, school officials rely on police to decide whether a lockdown is warranted, she said.

Police spokesman Sgt. Matt Young said police did not recommend the McClatchy campus be locked down because "we felt we had the threat isolated."

He and Lopez said that the final decision, however, rests with the school principal and district office supervisors. "It's a judgment call," Lopez said.

Metal detectors and gun-sniffing dogs are familiar sights at some of the tougher schools in cities like Los Angeles or Boston. After the shootings at Columbine High School in Colorado in 1999, they started popping up at more suburban districts.

Sacramento has considered the possibility of metal detectors before and run into opposition from students who claim they are a violation of privacy.

Molly Cundiff, a parent volunteer at McClatchy taking calls from concerned parents Friday, said a number of them want metal detectors used to scan students for weapons before entering the school.

Jennings said all options should be considered. But the trustee urged the district to move slowly and not overreact.

"What we don't want to do is create something more like a prison as opposed to an education facility, and then that doesn't take care of the problem," Jennings said.

Mejia said her staff would prepare a report for the board about various safety measures, looking at cost and other districts' experiences.

The board will take up the issue at next Thursday's board meeting. Mejia said that meeting would be "the beginning of a discussion" and said the district wouldn't make major changes without community comment.

Sacramento County Superintendent of Schools Dave Gordon said he does not know of any schools in the region that use metal detectors or gun-sniffing dogs. The only school he has ever visited with detectors, he said, was in Compton seven or eight years ago.

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