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McClatchy shooting averted, cops say

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Sacramento police said they prevented an attack at C.K. McClatchy High School on Thursday when they arrested two boys carrying a gun, ammunition and photographs of two female students who were their intended targets.

Two other youths also were arrested in connection with what police said was a plot stemming from a long-simmering dispute at the campus.

Despite the discovery of the loaded revolver and the apparent plot, school officials decided not to close the school or warn parents until hours after school had recessed, a move that angered some.

The alleged plot was uncovered about 8:30 a.m. when a sheriff's deputy at a Regional Transit light-rail station near the school ticketed two boys for fare-jumping and truancy.

One of the boys, a 15-year-old McClatchy student, was carrying a loaded revolver and extra ammunition in his pocket, said Sacramento Police Capt. Daniel Hahn.

The other, a 14-year-old Martin Luther King Jr. Junior High student, was found with several copies of a photograph of the alleged targets, Hahn said.

The deputy called a school resource officer from McClatchy to the station, where the officer recognized the girls in the photos as McClatchy students involved in the ongoing dispute.

Police said the boys were headed to McClatchy, where a 9 a.m. meeting had been scheduled between two groups of girls who had been involved in the altercation.

The dispute had been going on since mid-March, and the meeting was to include the two targeted girls, as well as parents, school officials and police.

The boy with the gun planned to "shoot (the girls) at the meeting or right before the meeting," Hahn said.

"He was not on his way to campus to shoot randomly," Hahn said.

"He had those two targets."

Authorities said nine students who may have been targeted or had some involvement in the earlier dispute were pulled from class.

Two other students later were arrested: a 13-year-old boy from John Still Middle School who allegedly provided the gun and a 14-year-old girl -- a McClatchy student -- who police said was ganged up on in the mid-March fight.

The two targeted students also were involved in that altercation, officials said, and Sacramento police believe "the boys were doing this on behalf of the female (who was arrested)," Sgt. Matt Young said.

The students face a variety of charges, including conspiracy to commit assault with a deadly weapon.

The McClatchy campus was not locked down after the loaded gun and photographs were discovered. Parents were not warned of the incident until automated telephone messages were placed at 4:54 p.m. -- after school had recessed for the day.

Principal Cynthia Clark said the campus was not shuttered because the threat was contained to the light-rail station and there was "no imminent threat" to the school.

Some parents questioned why stronger actions were not taken.

More than two dozen students interviewed by The Bee had not heard of the arrest until being contacted by reporters.

"It seems kind of weird that they wouldn't bring it up all day," said Molly Hitchings, a 14-year-old freshman.

"I could see it both ways. It could have caused hysteria.

"But I feel like I would have liked to have known, especially after all the stuff at Virginia Tech."

Hitching's mother, Jenny, said the school regularly leaves phone messages reassuring parents about school safety.

After each of those messages, she said, she has asked her daughter if she wants to continue attending McClatchy.

"Oh, God," she said. "Is this the place I want to be sending my child?"

Clark said parents should "absolutely not" be concerned about sending their children to school today. "Their campus is safe," she said.

Sacramento City Unified School District Superintendent M. Magdalena Carrillo Mejia said she was not made aware of the incident until about 1 p.m., when she was told by district spokeswoman Maria Lopez that police were looking into the matter.

She said she didn't get details until a discussion with police around 6 p.m.

Mejia said she leaves it up to police to decide whether a school should be locked down.

She was comfortable with the police decision not to call for a lockdown Thursday, although the ultimate decision whether to lock down is the district's.

Mejia said Thursday's incident at McClatchy was different from previous scares that resulted in lockdowns because police believed they had the suspects in custody.

Mejia said district policy calls for the principal to alert parents via a recorded phone message as soon as they get the facts.

"I'm confident that we are getting to things before they could lead to something else," she said.

Sacramento City Unified School Board President Manny Hernandez disagreed, saying McClatchy should have been shut down as soon as police discovered the gun and realized a threat had been made against students.

"When a gun is found, as in this case, and there's a threat against students, I do believe a lockdown is in order," he said.

Hernandez said the incident sheds light on the need for tighter security at Sacramento schools, including possibly using gun-sniffing dogs.

"This is too close for comfort," Hernandez said. "We've already escalated our efforts, and it seems like we have to do more than we already have been."

McClatchy has been the site of several high-profile incidents this school year.

In December, a 16-year-old student was pepper-sprayed and later arrested after struggling with a police officer near a classroom, officials said.

On Oct. 19, 2006, a 15-year-old boy shot a gun outside a pizza shop near the campus, leading to an hours-long lockdown at the high school.

During the lockdown, another 15-year-old boy shot himself in the hand inside a classroom.

Some students shrugged off Thursday's arrests, describing the episode as just another slice of drama at the school.

Ivan Gutierrez, 15, said the school has "police all over campus," but that violence on the campus "could happen out of nowhere."

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