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School Officials, Police Confront Fears and Rumors About Safety at Darien High

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A rumor about someone threatening to harm classmates at Darien High School. A history teacher saying she won't work on April 20, as a protest about school shootings and gun control. Students discussing whether to walk out on March 14 as part of a national protest that day.

Those are some of the things Darien school district officials and police are busy dealing with, two weeks after high school students were massacred in Parklands, Fla. and days after police [elsewhere in the country](#) responded to reports of threats or allegations of suspicious comments from students indicating that they wanted to shoot up their own schools. One case was [in Westport](#), another [in Vermont](#).

In Darien, Schools Superintendent Dan Brenner said district officials have been reviewing security measures and discussing the situation with police. Police Chief Ray Osborne issued a statement Wednesday that town police were alert to any threats to schools if they arise.

Osborne also said that Darien police won't be holding back if a shooter ever appeared in a school in town. Osborne was asked Wednesday by Darienite.com whether town police had any policy of watching and waiting if officers were present when any shooting started.

(Sheriff's deputies were criticized for staying outside when the Columbine High School massacre in Colorado took place in 1999, and Broward County deputies were also criticized for not confronting the shooter in the building.)

"Our training since Columbine is to arrive at the school if there's an active shooter and the first officer there is going in, confronting the shooter and taking him out," Osborne said. "That's how we're trained."

In part of an announcement issued earlier in the day, Osborne said:

"Since the tragedy that took place in Sandy Hook in 2012, much has been done at the police department in the way of training and how we respond to school related investigations. Our school resource officer at Darien High School is highly trained and well prepared to quickly respond to any emergency."

Brenner told the Board of Education that one result of the security review at Darien High School were the bollards — short pillars — put up this week near the building bridge. The bollards should prevent any unauthorized vehicles from being driven into the courtyard, he said.

Brenner also said school officials have been talking with students who have been considering walking out of classes on March 14 as part of planned nationwide protests involving walk-outs at schools to protest the perceived lack of safety from school shooters.

The superintendent did not say specifically what he or other officials are telling students regarding walking out of classes, and he did not answer directly when Darienite.com asked him whether officials were telling the students whether they would face disciplinary measures if they did walk out.

"We haven't yet gotten to that point," he said. "We're in conversations about ways to respond in a civil and respectful way."

Brener also said meetings have also been set up or are coming up for faculty and staff at schools to discuss building security and procedures if someone tried to endanger students in any incident similar to the ones in Parklands, Sandy Hook or Columbine.

Darien High School Principal Ellen Dunn told parents in an email Wednesday that "After school hours yesterday, a student shared with a DHS school counselor a rumor they overheard about another student threatening to harm classmates. [...] We immediately contacted the Darien Police Department who thoroughly investigated the incident and determined that it was not a credible threat."

Dunn asked parents "that you join us in reinforcing the message to students to share any questions or safety

concerns they may have with an adult (in or out of school)."

On Monday, First Selectman Jayme Stevenson said that although she and the Board of Selectmen had rejected a Police Department budget proposal for a school resource officer — a police officer — posted regularly at Middlesex Middle School, that was because the board hadn't received any messages of support from school officials about the idea.

Stevenson said Monday that she had asked the Police Department and school district to discuss the matter together and see if they wanted to propose the idea for this coming fiscal year budget or for the following one. The town likely would be able to fund it outside the regular budget process if town officials agreed with the idea, she said.

Brenner on Wednesday said that he and other district officials were meeting with police officials and are discussing the idea. He would not indicate if he supported the idea.

Osborne's Announcement

Here's the full text:

The members of the Darien Police Department would like to assure all of our residents that the safety of our children is a top priority.

In light of recent events, our staff has been in contact with the school administrators and School Superintendent Dan Brenner to review current safety policies in an effort to locate areas that might be updated or improved.

We will continue to maintain an excellent working relationship with the schools and we pledge to keep an immediate and open dialog in the event we receive information that involves any type of threatening behavior or circumstances.

Since the tragedy that took place in Sandy Hook in 2012, much has been done at the police department in the way of training and how we respond to school related investigations.

Our School Resource Officer at Darien High School is highly trained and well prepared to quickly respond to any emergency.

Our two Youth Detectives and our School Liaison Officers, as well as every other member of the Darien Police Department have received recent and up to date training on how to respond to an emergency should it be necessary.

We have also worked closely with the school facilities manager to review and enhance security measures to ensure that our school buildings are as safe as possible. Please be assured that all Darien police officers are committed to providing the highest level of service possible, especially when it involves to the safety of

children.

Any questions regarding safety issues that can be addressed by the Darien Police Department can be referred to either Detective Mark Cappelli or Detective James Palmieri in our Youth Division at 203-662-5330.

Dunn's Email to Parents

Here's the text:

Dear Parents and Guardians:

I am emailing you this afternoon to prevent any false rumors from causing undue alarm. After school hours yesterday, a student shared with a DHS school counselor a rumor they overheard about another student threatening to harm classmates.

As you know, we take all threats against our students, staff, and community very seriously and given the most recent tragedy in Florida, there is a heightened level of concern and vigilance.

We immediately contacted the Darien Police Department who thoroughly investigated the incident and determined that it was not a credible threat.

It is important that we continue to work together-students, family and faculty, and ask that you join us in reinforcing the message to students to share any questions or safety concerns they may have with an adult (in or out of school). We recognize and appreciate the student's efforts who stepped forward in this instance.

Please know that the physical and emotional well-being of our students is our highest priority and that we are committed to maintaining a safe and secure environment for our students, faculty, and staff at DHS.

Sincerely,

Ellen Dunn

Principal