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Lockdown at Acalanes High School

By Cathy Tyson



Local law enforcement officers gather outside Acalanes High School during the June 6 lockdown. Photo Gint Federas

Considering recent acts of violence on school campuses, police and school administrators jumped to attention when Acalanes High School principal Aida Glimme reported that she received a threat on Friday, June 6 targeting seniors at a school assembly slated for later that morning.

Due to the nature of the allegedly violent threats, and having gone through drills in case of this type of incident, Glimme placed the campus on lockdown. She couldn't directly comment about the student in question, citing confidentiality regulations, but did say that "we heard a statement that we perceived as a threat" on social media and so acted accordingly.

Especially troubling was an alarming picture posted on social media of the alleged suspect with the words "I am death."

Despite the fact that the suspect was identified and had not been seen at Acalanes that day, police searched the campus and set up a perimeter at the suspect's home, while waiting for additional personnel. Thankfully, as police prepared to enter the home, a message from the suspect was received at the school, explaining that he had barricaded himself in his house. Following police discussion with a parent, the fellow exited the house and was taken into custody. No weapons or explosive devices were found on the premises, although several computers were seized and will be examined.

Other law enforcement staff from around the county came to assist in the search, looking for potentially suspicious packages; medical and fire units were dispatched as a precaution. There was some confusion as parents who had come to drop off items for the seniors' assembly weren't allowed on the campus grounds; others gathered across the street after receiving messages from their children who were stuck in the lockdown.

"The police department continues to monitor the situation and is aware of the concerns of parents, students, and faculty members," said Lafayette Police Chief Erik Christensen. Extra police were on hand at the recent graduation ceremonies, but the chief noted that the presence of officers at the Acalanes campus or other off-campus events "should not be construed to indicate any increased threat" - they just believed it was the right thing to do.

There's been an outpouring of support for law enforcement since the incident took place. "We were so blessed that administration and police took a proactive approach and avoided a catastrophe," said concerned parent of an Acalanes student, Gint Federas. "As a parent, I was more comfortable watching from across the street with maybe another 50 parents rather than waiting at home by myself. Sure, rumors were rampant, so it took a great deal of restraint to focus on facts, not rumors."

Fellow parent of a graduating senior and local business owner Steve Ware commented, "This is a tragedy. We need to be fair to all concerned and have compassion. Our thoughts and prayers go out to the family."

Just a few days after the incident, at the June 9 City Council meeting, Mayor Don Tatzin recognized Christensen and the officers who responded and expressed the city's appreciation at how the incident was handled. Council member and mother of two Acalanes students, Traci Reilly, also spoke up, telling the chief, "You did absolutely the right thing for parents and the community." Crediting all the prior preparation and planning, the chief lauded the cooperation and support received from all who were involved.

The suspect was booked at the Martinez jail for terrorist threats. Police investigators continue to seek additional information about the incident and the suspect; anyone with information is encouraged to contact the Lafayette Police Department at (925) 284-5010 or via email at 94549tip@gmail.com.

Police Ask Parents to Monitor Their Kids' Social Media Sites

Noting the recent incident involving threats on a social media site directed at Acalanes High School students, the June 2014 City of Lafayette Police Department Crime Bulletin offered the following advice to help prevent potentially tragic events from happening:

"This incident highlights the need for parents to have access to the electronic devices and social media sites used by their children. Parents should know all of the access codes and passwords used by their children. Parents should randomly check those devices to see what their children are posting and what internet sites they visit. When children encounter a social media posting that concerns them, they need to say something to someone. Too many times tragic events are accompanied by individuals who knew there was something wrong, but failed to take any action."

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