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### Learning from Columbine, 10 years later

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Ten years ago Monday, when two students went on a killing spree at Columbine High School, Wendell Chu knew that schools nationwide would be forever changed.

"Columbine kind of shattered the fairy tale of schools being a kind of carefree place," said Chu, superintendent of the East Islip school district. "I knew it was going to change something, and it did. And it wasn't for the better."

Many Long Island schools in the post-Columbine world ramped up security by hiring law enforcement-trained guards, installing video cameras, instituting lockdown procedures and other measures. Most districts use automated alert systems to notify parents of trouble via e-mail and phone messages. Some districts bring in dogs to sniff for drugs and weapons.

These days, visitors to most school buildings have to be buzzed in, are asked for identification and given color-coded passes that can't be reused. "Ten years, 15 years ago, we didn't scrutinize the people who come into our buildings as we do now," Chu said.

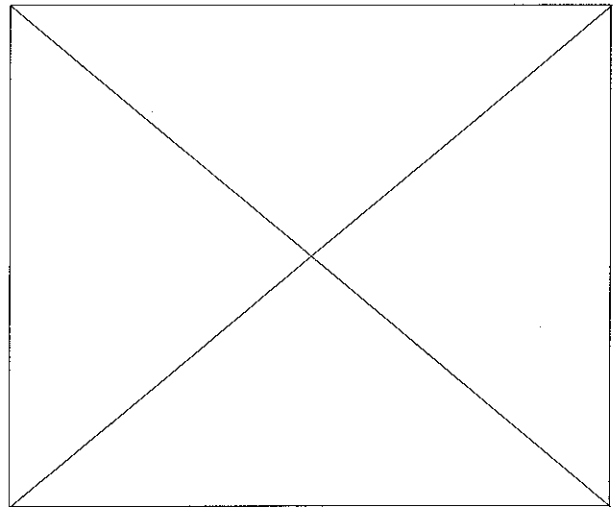
Experts say extra security needs to be complemented by efforts to identify and intervene with at-risk students. The two perpetrators of the Columbine killings were not outsiders, but disaffected students who felt like outcasts.

The two seniors at the suburban Denver school, Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, detonated homemade bombs and opened fire with shotguns, a rifle and a semi-automatic handgun. They killed a teacher and 12 students and wounded 24 others before committing suicide.

The Columbine shootings also solidified a partnership between schools and police, said Insp. Michael Cronin of the Nassau Police chief of patrol office. In Nassau, the department has officers who act as liaisons to schools and conduct lockdown drills. In turn, schools are more inclined to notify police of every possible threat, Cronin said.

But administrators struggle with the impact of increased security on the atmosphere.

"We still want schools to be warm and cuddly places of learning where children feel safe and



comfortable," said Connetquot superintendent Alan Groveman. "It's a balance. We don't want to be Fort Knox."

Security can keep weapons out, said Rick Phillips, executive director of Community Matters, a California nonprofit that aims to prevent youth violence: "What it doesn't catch is that kids come into school and they bring inside grudges, biases, prejudice and attitudes from home."

Last week his organization released a report that schools nationwide are not safer since Columbine despite more money spent on security, partly because of a lack of focus on violence-prevention strategies and social-emotional skills development programs.

Schools need to train all staff members "from guidance counselors to lunch ladies" to identify at-risk students - those with sudden changes in behavior, who seem isolated or show other red flags - said Carolyn Wolf, a Lake Success mental health lawyer whose consulting company helps schools identify and intervene with those students.

Social workers in Connetquot schools said there has been a strong mental health intervention effort in the district long before Columbine. Each school has a team of social workers, psychologists, teachers and nurses to discuss at-risk students and find appropriate resources for them. "Our goal is to help kids learn how to manage the many issues that come along with growing up," said Ed Kubik, a social worker at Sycamore Avenue Elementary in Bohemia.

Potentially dangerous emotional problems can stem from a host of issues from bullying to gossip to parents' divorce to abuse, Kubik said.

Laraine Pincus, a social worker at Oakdale-Bohemia Middle School, said she often goes to classrooms to remind students she's there for those who want to talk about anything. "They call me the 'worry doctor.' "

Groveman said the Connetquot district needs to be vigilant. Two years ago, a high school student's notebook was found to contain a detailed Columbine-style plot, resulting in the arrests of the student and a friend from another district.

Two years ago at Lindenhurst High School, a painting depicting an explosion and bearing a specific date led to a lockdown, said superintendent Neil Lederer. It was determined there was no threat, but the student artist had issues school officials helped him deal with.

"Now he's in college and doing well," Lederer said. "In the past, it would have been another drawing. People would be ho-hum about it."

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