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Threat of school violence hits close to home

Incident at local junior high reinforces the need for safety precautions

by Nadia Jaikaran and Sofia Papakos

A WJHS student was taken into custody on Sept. 16 after being found of possessing firearms and explosives and is potentially facing charges, police said.

A police report confirmed the mother of the child found two handguns, a shotgun, and explosive matter. Before students arrived on Monday, the Cook County Bomb Unit thoroughly checked the school, which caused concern for parents and students.

Just a few days later, on Sept. 20, two students found a note on the back of a desk at Glenbrook South High School reading, "there will be a school shooting on Sept. 25, 2018."

The writer was identified and taken into custody. Although, the charges have not been disclosed, GBS Principal Lauren Fagel reiterated the stress of the situation and encouraged students to reach out for help to the Student Services Department.

The rise of school violence in the last year alone has reached an all-time high, averaging one school shooting per week, based on a CNN report.

Junior Claire Dillon commented on the WJHS incident, "Honestly, it wasn't the incident that surprised me because I feel it's so normalized in our country now. It wasn't surprising. It was sad."

The national epidemic has raised conversation among the student body and neighboring districts, considering two school shooting threats within close proximity of campus.

"They really emphasize safe spaces and are doing what they can to make sure we're protected," said junior Nick Kuras.

One WJHS student criticized the lack of communication concerning issues of student safety precautions, besides the basic procedures.

"It's frustrating that no one talks about what's going on. It's all speculation and gossip between students. Teachers haven't addressed the incident itself," said the student.

New Trier Assistant Principal for Student Programs and Operations Athena Arvanitis said that New Trier is changing to keep students and staff safe.

"Here at New Trier, we take security very seriously. Part of it is, if you think about what we've done specifically over the last one to two years, we've done a lot of things that

are very visible to everybody who enters our building, implementing secure vestibules [and] having a stronger hold and management on our visitor check-in-check-out system," she said.

From a student perspective, junior Olivera Nikolich mentioned, "[Noticing] that teachers are talking about the issue much, much more. In every single one of my classes, I know where to go in case of an emergency. I've definitely noticed the locks on the door and there's a lot more security with making sure every visitor has an ID with a bright neon name tag."

Observing the advancing security measures the school has taken over the course of the last four years, senior Miles Goldberg noticed, "Teachers [wear] their IDs around their necks and every time you enter the building you have to show your ID."

Despite having the external basics of school safety covered, there's still space to question what we, as students, can do that will strengthen that sense of security.

According to Arvanitis, being able to distinguish the unwritten rule of not "snitching" and actually reporting a concerning comment or action, makes all the difference.

Junior Claire Dillon referenced red flags, for example, "someone who gets bullied [or] doesn't have very many people to talk to is where many



Cook County Bomb Unit searched the school to ensure student safety | WJHS

problems start if you don't have good coping mechanisms."

According to Arvanitis, social media is "one way to tip off that something may not be going well."

It can look like a lot of different things-- it can look like a peer posting a picture of guns in their house or it can be a post that triggers something within you that makes you say 'that's really odd,' or 'I would never post something like that.' It's once you get to that place of concern that makes you feel something is not right."

New Trier has listed the Trevian Anonymous Tip Line on the school website, which allows students to disclose any suspicious behavior or concerns.

While tackling such a widespread issue is certainly difficult, Arvanitis stated, "As far as what you've heard about school safety, there are lots of different things out there, there isn't one solution, and if there was, we wouldn't be hearing about all of the incidents occurring."

While the country is still trying to make schools a safer place, thinking about how students can make a difference is crucial as well.

"The behavioral piece of [being] accepting and open" can help students. Even as simple as "saying 'hey' or sharing a smile in the hallway goes a long way."

Kavanaugh hearing ignites political discussions

Supreme Court nominee's hearing captivates students and faculty

by Claudia Levens

Friday Sep. 28, it was nearly impossible to go to a class without hearing some mention of potential Supreme Court appointee Brett Kavanaugh's hearing and the sexual assault allegations he has been accused of by psychology professor, Christine Blasey Ford.

And it wasn't just last Friday; the roller coaster of Kavanaugh's hearings has captivated students since the beginning.

Not only are the stakes undeniably high-- the vacancy he could potentially fill is only on the highest court in the country, and his presence would tip its ideology further to the right, influencing at least the next 30-40 years of decisions-- but the circumstances of the allegation have implications that are poignantly relevant to students' lives.

According to Blasey Ford's poised but emotional testimony last Friday, Kavanaugh sexually assaulted her at a party while the two were in high school.

Thirty-five years later, Blasey Ford sent a letter to Senator Dianne Feinstein D-Calif. detailing her allegations against the man being evaluated for a Supreme Court



vacancy.

For senior Erin Murdoch who spent last Friday continually refreshing her phone for live updates, the hearing was an emotional experience to watch.

"It was very upsetting to watch and it actually moved me to tears. It's scary to be a seventeen year old girl at a time when it's being questioned whether high school students can understand consent and be held accountable for their actions," she said.

"The most troubling part of this for me is the storyline that 'boys will be boys' and that our actions don't matter," said AP Government and Civics teacher Lindsey Arado.

While Arado was excited and hopeful about the way the hearings captivated students, instigating them into following and discussing politics, she also remarked that some of the types of discussions she's witnessed are indicative of a fundamental



AP Images

discord in understanding sexual assault.

"I think it's fair to say that we all make mistakes, but the idea that some people think sexual assault isn't something that a person should be held accountable for is truly troubling," said Arado.

But for others, including senior Ethan Burfield, how the hearing was conducted was also a significant factor in determining how they feel about the events.

"It seems more like a character assassination than a trial, which is what it should be. It's devolved to a he-said she-said with no clear winner in sight," he said.

Senior Zachary Salberg said, "The fact that the allegations are being brought forward 35 years later only as he's being nominated seems sketchy to me," which echoes the sentiments of many who see Blasey Ford's allegations as a part of a political smear campaign.

"I know that Clarence Thomas is on the Supreme Court right now and similar allegations were brought forward against him in 1991. Now, that was obviously 30 years ago, so the circumstances are different-- our world has changed-- but I find it hard to buy into the idea that one thing should be the determining factor that undermines 50 years of a person's life," said Salberg.

Arado agrees that the world has changed to a certain extent since Hill's allegations against Thomas which took place when she was in high school. She's noticed that the Republicans' strategy in refuting the allegations is not grounded in discrediting the accuser as it was in Hill's case.

They aren't really seeking to invalidate Blasey Ford's story, but to make the case that her allegation is part of a Democratic smear campaign.

But she disagrees with the argument that credible sexual assault allegations should not be a determining factor in the process.

"This is so clearly not a trial where 'innocence until proven guilty' is necessary for due process. This is a job interview," she said.

Murdoch also spoke to the psychological effects of fear that sexual assault can have on a person.

"I think that regardless of when an event happened or when someone chooses to come forward, it is important to take their accusation completely seriously," she said. "With traumatic events, it can take survivors time to come forward. It is unfair to

devalue Ford's story by claiming that she came forward too late. There are many implications to creating an expiration date for accusations. It is a common trend seen in the media that when people come forward about sexual assault in high school or early in their lives, they are seen as ruining the boy's future, but if they come forward years later, it is seen as too late and they are told the past cannot be changed."

Blasey Ford spoke to this trauma in her testimony and said, "I am here today not because I want to be. I am here today because it is my civic duty."

Ultimately, a common thread throughout many student's comments relates to the dissatisfaction felt with the divisive politicization of the process.

According to Murdoch, "this event has been turned into a partisan issue that has turned democrats and republicans against each other instead of focusing on sexual assault and Ford's traumatic event. Ford's story has been minimized by the accusation that she is a pawn in a larger democratic sham."

Last Friday, Blasey Ford's testimony ended with the approval of an FBI probe which took place throughout last week.

As Judge Brett M. Kavanaugh's dramatic confirmation process lurches forward, all eyes are on five moderate and currently undecided senators who will either send him to the nation's highest court or strike down his nomination.