

Safety fears disrupt schools amid Columbine anniversary

By COLLEEN SLEVIN April 19, 2019 Updated: April 19, 2019 10:30 p.m.

San Antonio Express-News



A bouquet of flowers lies next to a piece of paper bearing the names of the victims of the massacre at Columbine High School nearly 20 years ago before a vigil at the memorial Friday, April 19, 2019, in Littleton, Colo. Photo: David Zalubowski, AP

DENVER (AP) — Fears about safety disrupted several Denver area schools Friday in the midst of events marking the 20th anniversary of the Columbine school shooting.

Students were kept late at a middle school in Lakewood so police could search the building after a tip was received about a possible weapon in the building. The lockout was lifted by late afternoon and school officials said no weapon had been found.

Another tip led to an evacuation of Brighton High School and tightened security at elementary and middle schools in the city north of Denver.

Tracy Rudnick, a spokeswoman for the 27J school district, said police evacuated the high school so they could perform a search. Rudnick said she could not release details about the tip that led to the security measures.

Both tips came in through the state's Safe2Tell program, which was set up to accept anonymous tips about concerns or threats following the 1999 Columbine shooting that killed 12 students and a teacher.

Lawrence Pacheco, a spokesman for Attorney General Phil Weiser whose office oversees the program, said it received 16,545 reports between August and April 14, surpassing the total of 16,000 reports during the previous school year.

Pacheco said he did not have totals incorporating data for this week yet and could not make any conclusion about the influence of the Columbine anniversary on threat reports. The program's staff would have to compare the data to other years' reporting, he said.

People can provide anonymous reports of threats, including threats of violence at schools, through the program's tip line, phone app and website. The program also handles reports of suicidal thoughts, bullying, sexual misconduct and other violent or dangerous situations.

Dispatchers then send reports to school or law enforcement officials.

Since the August start of this school year, reports of a planned school attack account for about 2% of all the tips submitted. Suicide threats are consistently the largest share of the reports, followed by drugs and bullying.

The program's annual reports show a year-over-year increase of total reports isn't unusual. Safe2Tell officials attribute the increase to more people learning about the program and being willing to use it.

A slate of events marking the Columbine anniversary continues Friday night with a community vigil planned at a park near the school building.