

By Amy Sylvestri

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In the wake of the Newtown, Connecticut school shooting, San Leandro police and schools are emphasizing student safety and discussing plans if such a tragedy were to happen here.

The San Leandro police and their SWAT team participate annually in "Operation Urban Shield," said Lt. Randy Brandt of the San Leandro police. They have held drills at the high school about a scenario with a school shooting and have trained at schools all over the Bay Area.

"A lot of the training is driven from active shooting scenarios," Brandt said. He added that in addition to training drills at schools, the police held a scenario about a gunman in a movie theater even before the Aurora, Colorado shooting last summer.

There are also two permanent school officers who have an ear to the ground about things like guns, drugs, and bullying at San Leandro schools.

“It’s as much as you can do,” said Brandt. “And our officers pay attention and make sure any issues they might see are addressed.”

San Leandro school Superintendent Cindy Cathey said that she and her staff make students’ safety their number one priority, and often work in collaboration with the police. She also said that there has been an increased police presence at the schools this week.

“There is a safety plan in place at every school,” said Cathey. “There is an intruder drill that takes place every year.”

Cathey added that those drills include different scenarios, such as what to do when the kids are in class versus out on the playgrounds or at lunch. She said they are constantly updating their strategies.

This week at San Leandro schools, there were counselors provided if any students wanted to talk and Cathey sent a letter home with younger students advising parents on how to talk to their child about the tragedy.

Parents of younger students were told to emphasize that schools are still a safe place and that it's okay to talk about any and all feelings and anxieties they may have.

Parents of older middle school and high school students were advised that this could be an opportunity to speak to the kids about mental illness or bullying.

"The schools customized their responses based on what the students needed," said Cathey, adding that most held a moment of silence for the Connecticut victims and had class discussions.

In the fall of 2011, in three separate incidents, guns were found on or near the campus of San Leandro High, but in each of those cases the police said the person with the gun had no plans for a school shooting.

