Texas police kill 15-year old student at school

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Two police officers armed with rifles shot 15-year-old Jaime Gonzalez shortly after the school day began at 8 a.m. on Wednesday at Cummings Middle School in Brownsville, Texas. The boy was rushed by ambulance to a local hospital where he was pronounced dead.

The school was immediately locked down. Frantic parents were kept at bay for two hours while most of the 750-member student body was evacuated to a high school.

School administrators reported the eighth-grade student was holding what appeared to be a handgun. They called the police department, located only a block away, for assistance. Students told reporters that they heard officers shout "Put down the gun!" right before shots rang out.

While it is too early to reach definitive conclusions, there are reasons to question the initial police justification for the sniper-style shooting, that the boy was threatening officers with a weapon.

Apparently, the boy had gotten in a fist fight with another student shortly before school began, and then began brandishing the object.

Police radio transmissions confirm that the police fired shortly after arriving at the school. The fatal shot hit the boy in the back of the head. There is also reported to be an entrance wound in the side of the chest. A third shot may have missed.

Moreover, police officials admitted at an afternoon press conference that the eighth-grade boy had an air-powered pellet gun, not a firearm.

Apparently the boy was in a hallway near the principal's office. Sound police tactics would dictate that the officers maintain positions of distance and cover while giving clear, repeated commands to de-escalate the situation.

Given that the subject was a schoolboy, the possibility that the alleged weapon was a toy—many of which closely resemble real firearms—should have been considered. Moreover, police are trained to avoid cross-fire, so the fact that the bullet entered the back of the boy's head strongly suggests that he was not facing the officers, and therefore could not have been threatening them when he was shot.

Brownsville is located at the southernmost tip of Texas, directly across the Rio Grande from Mexico. More than 90 percent of its 175,000 are of Latino descent, and many are heavily exploited at the port of Brownsville and in low-wage manufacturing. Median household income is less than half the national average.

The acute social inequality and resulting social tensions have been met with particularly egregious police violence.

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