Mass stabbing at Pittsburgh-area school injures 21 students and security guard

Samuel Davidson
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Twenty-one students and one security guard were injured in a school stabbing Wednesday morning at a high school near Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Seven students remain hospitalized, four of them in critical condition.

One student who received a stab wound to the liver has already undergone two operations and is expected to have a third as doctors attempt to repair the damage and stop the bleeding.

Alex Hribal, a 16-year-old sophomore at Franklin Regional High School, has been charged as an adult for the assault. No motive or reason has yet been given for the multiple stabbings that took place shortly after 7 a.m. Wednesday morning at the school in Murrysville, Pennsylvania, an eastern suburb of Pittsburgh.

The victims range in age from 14 to 61. They were taken to four area hospitals, with the four most serious rushed by helicopter.

A doctor at a nearby hospital where 7 students and one adult were taken reports that four received life-threatening injuries but that they were all expected to survive. The doctor credits one of the injured students with saving the life of another very seriously injured student by applying pressure to his wound.

Students report that the stabbing happened before classes started as students were getting ready and going to their morning class. The first call to emergency workers was placed at 7:13 am.

The parent of one student told reporters that their son was in the hall getting ready for classes when he heard people screaming and saw several students being stabbed. The principal and a security guard wrestled the suspect to the floor and held him until police arrived.

The high school sits on a campus with the middle and elementary schools nearby. After the stabbings, those students who were not injured were taken first to the middle school and then to the elementary school were anxious parents were allowed to pick them up.

There are 3,600 students in the Franklin Regional school district which server the bedroom communities of Murrysville, Export and parts of Delmont, about twenty miles east of Pittsburgh. There are 1,220 students in the high school.

The teen Alex Hribal, was arraigned and charged as an adult on four counts of attempted homicide, 21 counts of aggravated assault and one count of possessing a prohibited weapon on school property.

Westmoreland County District Attorney John Peck told the judge at the hearing that Alex had said that he wanted to die when he had been tackled to the ground.

His defense attorney, Patrick Thomassey, said that Alex was a good student with no criminal record. He asked the judge for a mental evaluation to determine if the youth is competent for a preliminary hearing that has been set for April 30 and that he will file a motion to have the case moved to Juvenile court.

Students at the school described Alex as a “shy” kid who kept to himself, although one student who called himself a close friend of Alex said that he was like any other teenager, interested in hockey and video games.

Pennsylvania Governor Tom Corbett came to Pittsburgh Wednesday evening to hold a press conference in which he stated the obvious: that more needed to be done for mental health services.

Corbett, however, is responsible for making the deepest cuts to public education in Pennsylvania history. In his first year in office, he cut education spending by $1 billion and after three years he has not restored the funding.

Those cuts have had a devastating effect on school districts throughout the state which have in turn made big cuts to teachers and other support staff. Many

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schools have cut back or eliminated their school nurse, guidance counselors, social workers, psychologists and other support staff.

Last year, the Philadelphia School District, eliminated all of its counselors in an attempt to save money and keep from cutting its academic programs too deeply.

Advocates of school psychological treatment note that teachers are already overburdened with their duties and that there needs to be more support instead of less available in schools.

Julia Szarko, president of the Association of School Psychologists in Pennsylvania and a school psychologist in the Central Bucks School District, told the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, "The logical response to all of this is to recognize that schools are the first line of defense for mental health supports for students and to recognize that we are at a shortage for support personnel."

The current school year has seen a continuation of the "random" school shootings that have characterized the last two decades in the US, with the most notorious being the Columbine High School massacre in Colorado in April 1999, and the December 2012 shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut in which 20 children, ages 6 and 7, and six adults were killed.

Since the school year began last fall, there have been two such school shootings before Wednesday's mass stabbing. On October 21, a 12-year-old student shot two 12-year-old students and killed a teacher before killing himself at Sparks Middle School in Sparks, Nevada. On December 13, Karl Pierson, 18, opened fire inside Arapahoe High School in Centennial, Colorado, critically injuring one student who died 8 days later and then killing himself.

A nationwide biennial survey of violence in the schools conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that 12.4 percent of high school students report that they were in a physical fight at least once, that 7.8 percent have been threatened or injured with a weapon and that within the 30 days prior to the survey, 5.5 percent of students did not go to school on at least one day because they did not feel safe.

The reaction of bourgeois politicians to Wednesday's stabbing, as in the aftermath of other such tragedies, will be calls for more police and security guards along with metal detectors and cameras within schools. Since the 1990s many states and school districts have adopted what are commonly called zero tolerance laws, in which students are immediately suspended or expelled for even minor infractions of school codes or laws in the name of combating school violence.

Research has shown however that these programs have no effect in reducing school violence. In fact, the largest study of these measures which followed nearly 1 million students in the state of Texas found that zero tolerance had no effect in reducing violence but it did account for a vast increase in suspensions and to higher dropout rates, especially among African American and other minority students.

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