

One dead, seven injured in Denver, Colorado suburb school shooting

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One student is dead and seven are injured after two gunmen opened fire in a Highlands Ranch, Colorado charter school on Tuesday afternoon. The shooters, described only as one adult and one juvenile, were taken into custody by police.

Shortly before 2 p.m. on Tuesday afternoon, the two shooters entered STEM School Highlands Ranch, a charter school with an enrollment of 1,850 students from Kindergarten through 12th grade, and opened fire in two separate locations within the high school area.

In the ensuing chaos, students and teachers fled the school; at least one student fleeing the scene had been shot and took shelter along with others in a neighboring house as he awaited medical care. School staff alerted the local police as soon as shots were heard. Officers entered the school quickly, ordering a lockdown of all schools in the area. Field officers with the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) were called in as well.

Helicopters hovered as parents gathered anxiously in a “reunification area,” hoping to be reunited with their children. Eight students, all ages 15 and older, were taken to local hospitals with gunshot wounds. By late evening, it was reported that one of those students, an 18-year-old boy, had died of his wounds.

Police have remained quiet about the identities of the suspects or their possible motives. They have stated that officers “struggled” to apprehend the two, both of whom were taken into custody. Law enforcement now awaits a warrant to search the car of one of the suspects, as well as their homes.

STEM School Highlands Ranch lies about eight miles southeast of Columbine, where Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris killed 12 of their fellow students and one teacher before taking their own lives in 1999. Along with other

schools in the area, Highlands Ranch held a vigil to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the Columbine shooting less than three weeks ago.

The Columbine shooting left an indelible mark upon American society. Klebold and Harris had carefully planned their attack, coordinating it with both Hitler’s birthday and the anniversary of the Oklahoma City bombing of 1995. They had armed themselves with pipe bombs, guns and ammunition. They charted the traffic flow into and out of the school building in order to maximize the number of shootings. They planned to detonate a giant bomb after they had finished shooting, and they had stowed explosives in the school kitchen towards that end.

Their aspirations did not end with the shooting and bombing of their school. Three years before hijackers weaponized planes and flew them into the Pentagon and the World Trade Center, Eric Harris’ journal detailed goals of hijacking a plane and crashing it into the center of New York City.

In the aftermath of the Columbine killings, schools across the United States installed metal detectors and forced students to carry their personal effects in transparent plastic bags. Rapid action plans were drawn up and initiated by police officers and school districts. Shootings such as 2007 shooting at Virginia Tech, which claimed 33 lives, and the 2012 shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary in Newtown, Connecticut, which claimed 28, led to ubiquitous police being embedded in schools as “school resource officers” (SROs) and active shooter drills.

Despite these efforts the shootings have continued. Last year marked a record number of 94 school shootings, the highest number recorded since 1970; fifty-five people perished in those shootings.

Leading up to the April 20 anniversary of the mass

shooting, Denver-area schools, including Columbine High School, were closed as police hunted for Sol Pais, an 18-year-old Florida woman who was reportedly obsessed with Klebold and Harris' killing spree. Pais had come to the Denver area on April 15, purchasing a pump-action shotgun and ammunition immediately upon her arrival. Her body was discovered at the base of Mount Evans on April 17, a single self-inflicted gunshot wound the apparent cause of death.

Despite the continued shootings and the traumatic active shooter drills, however, many of the parents at STEM Highlands Ranch felt that their children would be relatively safe at the small public charter school with a focus on science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). The school has never employed SROs, relying, instead, upon private security.

Nyki Giasolli, whose daughter witnessed part of the shooting, told NBC reporters, "We chose a small school because we thought they'd be safer, because we thought that everybody would know everybody."

Giasolli's sentiment eerily echoes that of Columbine parents in 1999. Columbine was a well-funded school in the middle of an affluent community. Its students were offered a broad array of academic and extracurricular activities. As both the Highlands Ranch and Columbine shootings reveal, though, no school is immune to the social pressures that produce these tragedies.

In the 20 years since Harris and Klebold opened fire on their classmates, the United States has waged a never-ending "war on terror." The US military has committed countless atrocities in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Yemen, Pakistan and Somalia. The intelligence apparatus has operated numerous "black sites," where torture and murder are the rule instead of the exception. Domestically, civilian police are armed and trained like occupying soldiers, and four separate presidents have maintained and expanded an electronic surveillance apparatus aimed at American citizens.

Social inequality continues to grow. There is a seemingly bottomless coffer for war, border patrols, and domestic spying. At the same time, education, healthcare and nutritional programs are made to operate on a shoe-string budget. Indeed, in many schools, students are forced to sit in overcrowded and undersupplied classrooms, without access to nurses, counselors or social workers while costly metal

detectors, security personnel and SROs are abundant.

The unending wave of school shootings highlights the American ruling class's disinterest in the safety and well-being of society's youngest and most vulnerable members. Like the increase in youth suicides, it points to deeply ingrained inequality and the despair it engenders. The answer to this growing crisis is the political mobilization of the American working class, in unity with workers internationally, fighting for socialism, meaning the reorganization of society to meet human need, not private profit.



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