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## Threats teach schools terror prevention

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CLINTON TOWNSHIP -- From the trifling to the terrifying, Isabella Spielman and her friends have seen threats of violence that run the gamut at Chippewa Valley High School.

Her experiences are echoed in districts across Metro Detroit, as a steady stream of bomb and other threats force schools to spend thousands of dollars to beef up security: locking down schools, cautioning parents with letters, installing security systems and instituting drills for teachers on what to do if their school undergoes a Columbine-like attack.

Spielman said students at her school weren't concerned last month when a peer was arrested after a typed bomb threat got stuck in a school printer. Nonetheless, district officials sent letters to parents alerting them to the incident.

Students had a far different reaction when former classmate Andrew Osantowski threatened an attack like the one at Colorado's Columbine High School on April 20, 1999.

"I was terrified when I heard about Osantowski," said Spielman, a 16-year-old junior.

"He looked like he really was going to go through with his plans," she said of the September 2004 incident. "A lot of kids didn't even come back to school for a couple days after that.

"But I think the other kid was just being stupid. I don't think he was serious about blowing up the school. But how do you really know for sure?"

Debra Hartman, spokeswoman for Rochester Community Schools, which dealt with two threats last month, said schools now let parents know of any threats immediately so they can make decisions regarding their children.

After the last threat, the district posted a notice on its Web site letting parents know that a message had been scrawled on a bathroom wall at Stoney Creek High School. Officials said they contacted police but did not close school because the threat was deemed to be a "very low level" copycat of a threat reported on March 13 at Rochester High School that warned of "Columbine Part Two."

"In the past, a school building may have been able to assess a threat and even deal with it before the community would be notified," Hartman said.

Thomas Moline, superintendent of Royal Oak Neighborhood Schools, said, "We go through a lockdown procedure with our staff on a semester basis along with our fire and tornado drills." That has been the practice since the Columbine attacks.

Moline said the school staff reviews the district's policy on weapons, drugs and other safety regulations in its student handbook with the entire student body at the beginning of each school year.

Students are required to sign a document that affirms they have read and understand all the policies, he said.

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### Prevention efforts stepped up

Many school systems have put in video monitoring systems and alarms. For example, the Ferndale Public School District plans to have a \$65,410 security system with 48 video cameras installed at its high school and middle schools by the fall to improve student safety. It joins other Metro Detroit school districts such as Chippewa Valley, Dearborn, Troy and Wayne-Westland in using cameras.

Districts have also hired companies that specialize in emergency preparation, threat risk assessments and security training.

For example, Northville Public Schools has worked with **Patriot Services Corp.**, which provides disaster and emergency preparation services to municipal governments, school districts and businesses. Patriot Services is based in Clawson.

"They advise us on a myriad of issues from something as drastically threatening as 'Columbine can happen' to homeland security issues to everything that's in our student code of conduct that deals with it," said Leonard Rezmierski, the district's superintendent. "It's an ongoing process."

Last month, a message that said, "Columbine can happen" was found in a Northville High School bathroom. The message prompted school officials to shut down the building and police to search it with bomb-sniffing dogs. The school reopened the next day.

Other districts have used student assemblies and forums for parents to discuss the gravity of making threats against a school and its consequences.

"The district has held meetings with students where counselors and staff talked to them about how serious the consequences are for making a threat and the changes in the laws and how prosecutors are looking very seriously at all of these kinds of things," said Lorraine Grinnell, director of communication and district services for Lapeer Community Schools.

Grinnell said the district has also tried to take steps to deter pranksters from making threats to get out of class by sending students to a safe location near school to finish out their day rather than dismissing them in the event of a threat. These steps were taken after the district dealt with 15 threats of violence last year.

Patty Kovach, who has a 15-year-old and a 17-year-old in a public school, said she thinks school districts are doing everything they can to keep children safe in class.

"But, of course, I still worry about them when they're at school," said Kovach, 45, of Sterling Heights. Her two children attend classes at Warren Consolidated Schools' Warren Mott High. "That's a 24-hour worry, though. I worry about them when they're at home, at school, at work, too."

Last year, a 16-year-old Warren Mott student posted a "hit list" on the Internet over Memorial Day weekend with the names of 47 classmates he said he never wanted to see again.

The boy was charged with making a false report or threat of terrorism, a 20-year felony, and pleaded no contest. He was convicted and sentenced to a year of probation. He was also suspended for his entire junior year.

### Prosecutors take hard line

It's unclear whether the number of bomb threats and student attacks are increasing. Officials say they haven't seen a rise in threats in their districts, but have seen more news reports about incidents.

Kenneth Trump, president of Cleveland-based National School Safety and Security Services, said there's an upswing in aggressive behavior and violent incidents in schools across the country.

The company has tracked 75 nonfatal school-related shootings this year, compared with 52 last year and 68 in 2004, Trump said. It has recorded 20

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school-associated violent deaths this year, 39 last year and 49 in 2004. That compares with 16 and 17 in 2003 and 2002.

Some local prosecutors are taking a hard line, charging the young offenders under the 2002 Michigan Anti-Terrorist Act, which defines terrorism as any act that is "dangerous to human life and intended to intimidate or coerce a civilian population."

Macomb County Prosecutor Eric Smith, who has prosecuted several school-related terrorism cases in recent months, feels it is his job to come down hard on offenders.

"The problem is, you don't know who is joking and who isn't," Smith said. "And I'm not going to let any of these cases go by thinking it's a joke, only to have something bad happen later on."

Oakland County Prosecutor David Gorcyca said prosecutors are forced to charge students with terrorism. "There are no other appropriate statutes that provide prosecutors an alternate means of charging these kids," Gorcyca said. "I would encourage the Legislature to review these kinds of cases, and taper a charge for school bomb or Columbine-type threat."

Among recent school threats

April: Inkster High School was evacuated after a bomb threat was telephoned to the school. A written threat was discovered inside a bathroom at Riverview Community High School the same day.

March: A 13-year-old student at Croswell-Lexington Middle School detonated a homemade bomb outside the school building.

March: Northville High School officials found a message in one of the boy's bathrooms that said: "Columbine can happen."

March: Rochester High School senior Daniel Ray Davis, 18, was accused of scrawling a threat promising "Columbine Part Two" on a school bathroom wall.

March: A 16-year-old Center Line High School student was accused of threatening to kill the school's public safety officer and bomb its cafeteria.

February: Two 10th-graders at Dearborn High School were accused of posting a threat against the school on the Internet.

December: A 12-year-old seventh-grader at Wyandot Middle School in Clinton Township was charged with threatening to blow the school up in messages she sent on the Internet.

November: Amy DeWinter, 17, was charged with making a false report of a bomb threat at Center Line High School. She pleaded guilty and was sentenced to two years of probation last month.

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