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'See something, say something'

Local school administrators react to Uvalde shooting

By Benjamin Pierce
Times Staff

When two area superintendents were getting the 'pings' from their phone notifications and watching the headlines sprawl across their televisions and computers that another school shooting was happening across the country last week, their first reaction wasn't dissimilar to most others.

School District of Arcadia Superintendent Lance Bagstad found himself disappointed and sad that innocent children were again the victims of violence and never made it home from a day of school that was supposed to be filled with their favorite teacher and time with friends.

Whitehall School District Superintendent Mike Beighley found himself frustrated because he fears the same cycle will repeat itself — people share social media posts and demand change while politicians take over TV news, and then a week or two goes by and life goes back to normal.

"When you think of those specific little kids and their teachers that were killed, that's the hard part. But the concern for me is we'll talk about this for two weeks, and then folks go back to doing exactly what they were doing on Monday without looking at any real depth to what causes these scenarios," Beighley said.

The shooting at Robb Elementary in Uvalde, Texas last Tuesday left at least 19 children and two teachers dead when an armed 18-year-old barricaded himself in a classroom.

Both local superintendents said while it's hard to compare directly to a school in Texas, they empathize with the community, staff and families. Both Bagstad and Beighley said they hope that it reminds people that these acts of violence do continue to happen and shouldn't be taken lightly.

What now?

Next steps are a complicated equation, both said.

Gale-Ettrick-Trempealeau sent a letter to families after the incident, increased

the police presence in and around the school district and encouraged students to seek counseling if they wished. Superintendent Michele Butler could not be reached for comment for this story. Arcadia opted not to send

any formal communication to families after a deep dive into the situation and how it relates to their district, Bagstad said.

Both Beighley and Bagstad said that their district reviews safety protocols

constantly, adding that they communicate with other area education leaders regarding safety on a regular basis as well as when a shooting such as Tuesday's happens.

Beighley said questions

come up out of the blue that help the district review its safety policies and lockdown protocols. These protocols are reviewed more than monthly, he said.

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Grand Parade Draws Large Crowd

Members of Tickfer-Erickson American Legion Post 17 and the Arcadia boy scouts handed flags out to attendees of the Broiler-Dairy Days Grand Parade on Sunday. The return to the traditional format proved to be a success as Arcadia's downtown area was packed with spectators looking forward to seeing familiar floats and taking home as many sweet treats as possible. See more photos from the celebration on Page 5.

(Times photograph by Andrew Dannehy)

Despite money crunch, courthouse work needed

By Debbie Foss
Times Staff

Though a county committee is considering slow-walking courthouse renovations to try to figure out how to pay for them, deciding where to locate some county departments will become unavoidable as the new Justice Center is completed.

The higher-than-expected price tag for building the new Justice Center has already required reallocation of the \$3.5 million designated for courthouse renovations to be used on the center instead. It's also likely that at least an additional \$2.3 million of the county's portion of money from American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) would have to go to the Justice Center.

The result is that there is no specific source of money

for courthouse renovations. Members of the county's property committee last Thursday also worried that there could be more cost overruns on the Justice Center, whose original cost of \$40 million has climbed to \$43.1 million.

"If we're short," asked committee chair Dan Schreiner, "what are our options? To go back to bonding would be ludicrous."

The county's construction consultant, Kurt Berner of Samuels Group, said he is confident that the \$3.5 million reallocated to the justice center for a contingency fund and furniture is accurate.

"But we've been surprised at the hikes," Berner said. "I'd be surprised if we exceeded the number, but we're in an unstable

market." The increased cost "wasn't caused by growth of the building, it was caused by growth of the costs," he added.

Berner suggested the committee propose a resolution to the county board allocating ARPA money to the project with any unspent funds being returned to other projects.

Following a suggestion from committee member Dave Orsch that perhaps courthouse renovations could be paused until funding is clear, maintenance supervisor Jeremy Matheny said the departments of land management, human services and health will lose their current space once the new center is attached to the courthouse.

"These departments will be gone," Matheny said. "We

will need to know where to put them."

"The board made a commitment and the renovations will have to be done," said committee member Dick Miller.

The committee also will consider seeking use of property leased for farming by the county healthcare center as a potential site for an equipment storage shed for the highway department. Highway commissioner Al Rinka told the board the center's property would require about \$600,000 less in site work than another location near the highway department office. Rinka is advocating for a \$4.3 million building to store equipment that now sits outside and consequently "requires \$10s of thousands in repairs."



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Local Resident Shares Kenya Trip

Renee Schank of Arcadia educated about 25 community members in a room at the Wanek Center last Wednesday about her humanitarian efforts in Kenya, Africa. Schank has visited multiple times to help build schools and homes in various communities and often brings donations with her, all while learning about African culture and their lifestyle. (Times photograph by Benjamin Pierce)

Independence school board simplifies referendum language

By Julie Dick
Times Staff

The Independence school board moved forward with plans for a fall referendum during a special meeting May 23.

A committee had worked to simplify the language. The recommended wording clarified the amount of money requested as “900,000 dollars per year, starting in the 2022-23 school year and ending in the 2024-2025 school year.”

The wording was approved unanimously. The

proposed date for the referendum would be Aug. 9 of this year.

Discussion also continued regarding insurance plans for the fall. United Health had revised its cost estimate within the hour, possibly reducing the rate of increase from 9.5 to 4.8 percent over last year. However, another company had an estimate that might save the district 12 percent.

Board members also expressed concern about in-network coverage. Some plans might not include pri-

vate practice doctors, which could force individuals to change healthcare providers.

“We don’t necessarily have to make a decision tonight and I don’t think we should,” said Barry Schmidt, district superintendent.

The district’s contract goes through June, but teachers remain covered through August.

The board also reported that 120 students were signed up for summer school, significantly higher than the 80 expected. No cap was placed on enrollment.

Local school administrators react to Uvalde shooting

(continued from Page 1)

“If there’s not a sad commentary for our society today, that might be it,” Beighley said, “that we have to look at this scenario literally continuously to keep our kids and our staff safe in what should be the safest place in the world.”

There is a balance, too, in making sure that students and staff are aware of the procedures while also not putting them all over the school so that anyone can see them or find them, Bagstad said. Staff have forms in every classroom detailing protocols and what steps they can and should take.

There are some people who want more practice of active shooter drills and emergency situations, but one issue with doing so too often is that then anyone could be watching and taking note of all the details and plans.

“I think there has to be some caretaking in making sure that you don’t share everything that you’re going to do with everybody on the face of the earth because that just creates a system in which everybody knows what you’re already going to do.”

Safety measures can be reviewed, Bagstad said, but people also need to remember that sometimes these issues are deeper than just locked school doors.

“I think people need to realize that we’re going to do everything we can possible, but unfortunately there are bad people that choose to do bad things,” he said. “And unfortunately, I don’t know if we’ll ever be able to prevent all bad people from doing all bad things.”

Training helps but can’t always simulate the true fear and stress of such a situation in real time.

“The training is there to have you be prepared so that you can instantaneously react,” Bagstad said. “But I don’t think there’s anybody that can tell you how they will react if bullets are flying and glass is shattering and everything else.”

‘See something, say something’

Schools truly are safe, Beighley said, adding that it can be frustrating to see politicians take advantage of that for their own gain when these events happen. Staff in Whitehall are trusted to educate and talk with their students about these events however they feel is appropriate and necessary, he said.

In Arcadia High School, the message ‘See something, say something’ flashes on screens throughout the building all day, and Bagstad said the school strives to foster an environment where students

can trust staff and be honest if something seems unsafe or they are concerned.

That should be the big takeaway from all of this, he said — people need to support each other and make connections. And they can’t be scared to step up and say something if they are worried.

“I think people have to just report things or anything that’s suspicious,” Bagstad said. “You’d rather have something reported that is maybe nothing than not have something reported that turns into something.”

It’s a constant focus for schools to try to prevent any sort of mental health problems, and staff continuously evaluate safety and figure out which kids might be struggling or may need more intervention. But that should be happening outside schools, too, Beighley believes.

“They’re continually on edge trying to assess which kids might be struggling or which kids might be someone to keep an eye on — not from a perspective of ‘They’re going to be a school shooter’ — but that we ought to help them,” he said. “And until we as a society figure out that we’re willing to help one another and work with one another as opposed to passing the buck to somebody else, I don’t know what else is going to change.”

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