

Board maintains T.R. Leger is safe place

Posted By Michael Peeling

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A spokesperson for T.R. Leger Adult Alternative School believes its space on Belmont Street in St. Lawrence College is a safe environment despite the stabbing of a 16-year-old student in a classroom Monday.

"This was an isolated incident," said Terry Simzer, public relations officer for the Upper Canada District School Board. "It's peculiar, there's no question about that.

"We still believe we have a safe learning environment at T.R. Leger school. An isolated incident can occur anywhere, but unfortunately this one occurred at T.R. Leger."

Simzer says the school board is co-operating fully with the Cornwall Community Police's investigation into the stabbing, which has led to a charge of first-degree murder against another student, age 17.

The board is conducting its investigation into how and why the stabbing occurred and what can be done to prevent similar incidents in the future.

"Are there things that need to be changed?" Simzer asked rhetorically. "We can't make those decisions until we have all the facts."

Students Willianne Harris and Mandy Parent felt some changes are necessary to the school's security tactics. They stood on the sidewalk along Montreal Road Monday evening and Tuesday in front of the campus with a placard reading "Stop! the violence in our schools before it's too late."

Harris hopes the school will install surveillance cameras and metal detectors to help prevent future violence.

The school board's second vice-chairman, Dave McDonald, said attempting to implement such security measures is risky territory to tread, in that it could be construed as infringing on students' personal rights and freedoms, citing a recent court ruling against locker searches.

Regrettably, he said, violence in schools still seems to occur even after extraordinary security measures are implemented.

"Aside from getting into a situation where we pat everyone down as they come into the school, we do our best to keep our campuses safe for every school," McDonald said. "We pay attention to what's going on around the campus. If there's something we need to learn from this, we'll learn from it."



T.R. Leger is located on the third floor of the Moulinette building at St. Lawrence College. The stabbing is said to have occurred in one of the classrooms while a class was in session.

Because the school board leases space from St. Lawrence College, Simzer says security for T.R. Leger is what the college has established.

According to St. Lawrence College's director of facility management services, Blayne Mackey, the Cornwall campus has one security guard on duty per shift during class hours for the 800 college and 150 T.R. Leger students.

Custodians do double duty as security when the school is closed and facilities management staff are also available in case of an emergency.

There are security cameras that monitor the corridors, common areas and exterior of the school, but not the classrooms.

Mackey said installing metal detectors at the school isn't in the cards at this time, nor does it seem like a very effective means of reducing the likelihood of another incident such as Monday's stabbing death.

"The students have access to potential weapons if they really want to do something," Mackey said. "There are workshops in the school." Of the 12 points of entry into the Cornwall campus, Mackey says few have access control devices, but one is an emergency exit in the north end of Moulinette Hall that sounds a fire alarm when the door is opened.

Ironically, Mackey said, he just interviewed candidates for the new college position of associate director of emergency management and planning "to beef up the security portfolio."

The college is also spending \$600,000 over the next year to install card access devices on most of the campus entry points for the students and staff to swipe in, more security cameras and a public address system.

"That's often a school's biggest Achille's heel in situations like Monday's," Mackey said. "How do you let everyone know what is going on during a time like that?"

The PA system will also let the user send out e-mails and text messages to students and staff as well.

Police were still on-site at the school Tuesday investigating the incident while classes at the college resumed for the day. T.R. Leger was open, but classes are not due to resume until today.

Grief counsellors were made available to the students at the school and will remain there as long as necessary, according to Simzer.

Frank Hummell, T.R. Leger's principal, and Don Fairweather, dean of St. Lawrence College, could not be reached for comment.

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