



Bethel Park teachers learn how to handle intruder

AIU in-service shows 50 faculty across county what to do

Bethel Park teachers Christopher Tobias and Brian Scott were among about 50 teachers from across the county who learned new and useful techniques to use in their classrooms during an in-service session Monday.

But their lesson had nothing to do with academics.

The men spent their morning learning how to take down a gunman, should one show up in the classroom, and how to physically fend off an agitated student, parent or intruder.

The session, titled "Faculty Critical Incident Response Training," was offered as part of the Countywide Professional Development Day sponsored by the Allegheny Intermediate Unit. Its presenter, Sam Rosenberg, is a former Marine and bodyguard, who now runs his own company teaching people how to manage interpersonal aggression.

Mr. Tobias and Mr. Scott participated in several scenarios in which they were taught how to disarm and knock over an armed intruder -- whether a student or outsider.

Both men said they hoped they never have to use the techniques but thought it would be a good idea to learn them so they can protect themselves and their students.

"It crosses your mind that this could happen. I do feel better equipped now," said Mr. Scott, a physical education and health teacher and assistant football coach.

Mr. Tobias, a German teacher and fencing coach, thought the training was so important he's hoping to round up a group of colleagues to enroll in a more intense course from Mr. Rosenberg.

"I would think the kids would feel better seeing someone in control," Mr. Tobias said.

Mr. Rosenberg acknowledged that the statistical probability of a gunman showing up in any classroom is "very, very low, but in reality it is a phenomenon we have to deal with."

Most people, he said, live in denial because the subject is too frightening to think about. But, he said, those people deny themselves the chance to formulate a plan. Thinking about the possibility and training for it, gives a teacher the chance come up with a plan, he said.

Mr. Rosenberg's basic message to teachers was that the safest response to an armed intruder is to run and hide. He said school procedures such as lock downs are generally effective and that local law enforcement officers, once on the scene, are trained to deal with the situations.

"If you can run, run. If you can hide, hide or lock down," he said.

But then he focused on what a teacher should do if "you are in the ultimate worst-case scenario and your classroom is the first one hit."

If that happens, he said, "You can't run and you can't hide; you must be ready to fight back. You have to be prepared to protect yourself and your classroom."

He said most school shooters have spent an inordinate amount of time planning and preparing their attack and are looking for multiple victims.

"Kids don't come to school with plans to kill one or two students. They want a high body count," Mr. Rosenberg said.

But, he said, most are not looking for or expecting a fight from victims and would likely be easily startled if they got one.

Teachers, he said, should knock the gunman off guard by throwing whatever items may be closest -- a briefcase, book, etc., and then immediately rushing to disarm the intruder.

The basic method he taught, using Mr. Tobias and Mr. Scott to demonstrate, is to make a "V" shape with both hands and use that V to grab behind the barrel of the gun and redirect it to one side or the other and then to strike the intruder to knock him down and get the weapon.

He showed the teachers a method of striking the intruder by using their hands or fingers to push the intruder's head back by the nose. The method, he said, does not require a lot of strength but is considerably painful for the intruder.

He also demonstrated how a teacher outside the classroom could come in from behind and assist in the effort to disarm a shooter.

Teachers asked whether they should involve students in the effort to disarm a shooter. Mr. Rosenberg said that "is a delicate matter" and may depend upon school district policies.

But he said it may be wise to tell students "you may have to back me up" in the event the shooter gets past the teacher. "Some students will panic, but others may act, and it could make a difference," he said.

While Mr. Rosenberg has done extensive work in the corporate world, he's been in demand at schools and universities since the Virginia Tech shootings.

He said he has trained teachers and has given lectures to students groups. Colleges in particular are interested in training faculty and students on how to protect themselves, he said.

He offered these statistics about school shooters:

.75 percent of the time they talk about their plans beforehand.

.If they are students, 50 percent of the time they are encouraged by other students and 50 percent of the time their behavior ahead of the shooting has caught the attention of school officials.

.75 percent of the time they have threatened to kill themselves.

.More than 50 percent of school shootings have been brought to a close by either teachers, other students or another school staff member such as a custodian.

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