



SWAT Team Shoots 'Armed' Fla. 8th-Grader

By KELLI KENNEDY

LONGWOOD, Fla. - An eighth-grader was shot and wounded by a SWAT team officer in a school bathroom Friday after he pulled out a pellet gun that resembled a real weapon and later raised it at a deputy, authorities said.

Sheriff Don Eslinger said the 15-year-old boy brought the gun to Milwee Middle School in his backpack. Eslinger said two students saw it and one persuaded the other to report it, causing a scuffle.

The alleged gunman ordered one of the students into a closet, dimmed the lights and ran from the classroom. He then went around the campus carrying the weapon, Eslinger said. Deputies eventually isolated him in a restroom, and the school was evacuated.

Eslinger said negotiators tried unsuccessfully to start a dialogue with the boy, identified as Christopher David Penley.

"He did not respond," Eslinger said. "He refused to even comment. All he said was his first name. He did not drop the firearm."

When the boy raised the gun at a deputy, he shot the youth, the sheriff said.

Penley was taken to a hospital, where he was on "advanced life support," the sheriff said.

"He was suicidal," Eslinger said. "During this standoff, and during the chase, the student said he was going to kill himself or die." At one point, the boy held the gun to his own neck.

No one else was injured. The sheriff's office confirmed later that the weapon was a pellet gun fashioned to look like a 9mm handgun. The tip of the gun had been painted black, covering brightly colored markings that would have indicated it was nonlethal.

Investigators did not know why Penley brought the weapon to school. "We are looking into his past, and all kinds of different issues possibly," Eslinger said.

Classes were canceled for the rest of the day, and frantic parents arrived to pick up their children from the 1,100-student public school in suburban Orlando.

"When I saw the news, I just couldn't believe this was my daughter's school. I came right away," said Anil Santos, whose daughter, Aleister, is in eighth grade.

Sarah Tivy, 12, said some students were frightened, but she appeared calm.

"I just figured that if someone is going to bring a gun to school, then they need to be taken out of school," she said.

Kelly Swofford, a neighbor whose 11-year-old son is close friends with Penley, said he visited their home Thursday night and complained that "people were picking on him at school. I told him he needed to talk to his guidance counselor."

Her son Jeffery said Penley talked about wanting to die when the two had breakfast Friday morning. He said Penley had been fighting with another boy, allegedly over a girl.

"Everybody knew they were going to fight," Jeffery said. "I heard a rumor that he had a BB gun, but I didn't think he really had one."

Phone calls to Penley's home were not answered Friday, and a person who answered the door declined to comment.

As dusk fell, Marie Hargis stood in front of the school with a sign that read "Stop the violence." Her 14-year-old son and 13-year-old daughter attend Milwee.

"My youngest daughter is just very emotionally messed up. She started crying and said, 'Mommy, I don't want to go back.' They should not fear having to go to school."

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