

State Education code requires security measures

Richard Baumgartner brushed aside a question about the courage it took to force open a locked office door and enter unarmed into a room where a man was threatening a teacher with a knife.

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Richard Baumgartner brushed aside a question about the courage it took to force open a locked office door and enter unarmed into a room where a man was threatening a teacher with a knife.

"It was just a reaction — on instinct," the Rise Academy director said.

The teacher escaped unharmed, but Baumgartner was not unscathed in the struggle. He suffered a slight puncture wound from the knife on the right side of his lower back.

When he went to a doctor later to have the wound cleaned and dressed, he was urged as a precaution to go to an urgent care center for x-rays and a closer examination. He took the advice.

"I think everybody handled it really well. We were really lucky," he said.

Baumgartner said he was in a different one of the school's 12 buildings when suspect George Bradley, 32, came in the school's main building.

One of the teachers found Baumgartner and told him a man was there who said he had just killed his mother and asked them to call the police.

He headed for the main building, but when Baumgartner tried to go in the front door, Bradley closed it in his face and locked it.

After sending the teacher to warn other teachers to lock their doors and keep students in the classrooms, Baumgartner went around the building to come in the locked back door.

"The kids were secure. Everyone was held hostage in the office," he said.

As Baumgartner approached it, three or four of the female employees burst out of the back door, he said.

"I thought everyone was free at first. Then I heard screaming coming from the inner office," he said.

Baumgartner went in the back door and saw the intruder locked in an office with a teacher. He hit the door twice with his shoulder, and the door was forced open at the jamb the second time he hit it, he said.

Baumgartner expected to fly forward into the room when it opened, but instead he bounced backward and landed on the floor, the school director said.

"He came out of the office and focused his attention on me. That is when I got jabbed with the knife," he said.

Baumgartner picked up a chair to defend himself from further attacks, and Bradley started edging his way toward the front door, he said.

The intruder was muttering, "I'll kill her," but Baumgartner didn't know who he was talking about.

The teacher who had been locked in the office with him escaped out the back door at some point, but he was so focused on the suspect he never saw her leave.

Baumgartner tried to reason with the man briefly before Lt. Elliot Eldredge of the Lubbock Fire Marshal's Office came in the front door.

"When he saw the officer, he dropped the knife," Baumgartner said.

Wanting to make sure he stayed disarmed, Baumgartner went for the weapon. However, Bradley was closer to it and picked it up again before the charter school director got to it.

The assistant fire marshal had a gun, and when the intruder saw it, he dropped the knife a second time. Eldredge took him out of the front door of the building.

Baumgartner said security at Rise Academy is no better or worse than at other schools. They can't have all of the doors locked all of the time or it would violate fire codes, he said.

Visitors who come on campus are supposed to go in the main office building, he said.

School officials will be reviewing security procedures, and Baumgartner said he is not sure what will be changed.

"The bottom line is unless you make a school like a prison, you can't avoid the possibility of these kinds of random acts of a deranged person — short of fencing and barbed wire and a guard at the gate," he said.

Linda Rowntree, associate executive director of the Region 17 Education Service Center, said school districts are required by the Texas Education Code, Section 37.108, to have security audits every three years

Region 17 has a team of people who conduct the safety audits for smaller school districts in the region, she said.

However, charter schools are not required to do the security audits, said Debbie Ratcliffe, director of the Texas Education Agency's Division of Communications.

"That's part of the law they are exempt from," Ratcliffe said. "Charters are exempt from most of the section regarding school safety. When the Legislature created charters, they tried to leave them with a lot of flexibility. They are not required to prepare a multi-hazard emergency plan or prepare security audits periodically."

A rumor circulated Monday morning that the Talkington School for Young Women Leaders and Estacado High School, which are both near Estacado, had been locked down by the Lubbock Independent School District.

That was not the case, said Craig Jackson, interim LISD police chief. Jackson dispatched an extra patrol officer to stay near Talkington until he confirmed the suspect was in custody, he said.

LISD communications specialist Brian Morris said the Talkington school is locked all the time, Visitors come in, push a button and an employee in the main school office can see them on camera.

Jackson said high schools are not as easy to secure as elementary school and middle schools are because they are bigger and have parking lots and different doors where students enter the school.

"We almost always have a police officer at high schools during the day and, at times, we have an extra one," he said.

Security measures that limit access control are part of the school bond measures that were passed by voters last November, Jackson said. However, the security measures have not yet been installed.

John Booth, director of Premier High School, said the charter school's building at Wayland Plaza has only one entrance at the front. Two employees are at the front of the building, and visitors can't get by them without permission, he said.

When parents visit, employees can call back to the classrooms and have the children come to the front to see the parents, he said.

"You are not going to get back here unless it is a forced entry," Booth said.

The Harmony Science Academy, another Lubbock charter school, has a waiting room just inside the front door where visitors cannot go further until admitted by personnel in the office, said assistant principal D'Ann Crowley. Parents who are known to school officials will be admitted, and others will not be allowed in until they have undergone a

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driver's license check that would identify a criminal background, she said.

The school has a lockdown procedure that can be implemented swiftly, Crowley said. A lockdown announcement over the school PA system will cause teachers to close classroom doors that lock automatically when closed. Teachers have procedures to get children out of view from windows in the doors or to cover the windows. Instructions for the safety procedures are posted by the door for substitute teachers.

"We also have cameras in the halls," she said.

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