

# Post-Littleton anxiety is subsiding at high schools

**By Tim Smith**  
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Finally, post-Littleton anxiety at Farmington's high school campuses is subsiding, officials said.

"My impression is it is settling down," said Mary Brown, assistant principal at Harrison High School. "Our concerns for students doesn't go away, but the mood is less anxious."

Despite incidents such as a recent false bomb threat by a freshman — which turned out to be a toaster inside a brown paper bag — Farmington High School Principal John Barrett said the mood of students is returning to one of normalcy.

"We talk with kids individually," Barrett said Tuesday, "and they seem to be OK ... They feel safe and secure and the atmosphere at Farmington High School is like it always has been, calm. Other than these rumors."

Police continue investigating all rumors, suspicious behavior or

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**John Barrett**  
—Farmington High School principal

potentially volatile comments.

Brown said it was understandable why some kids might become anxious, following the shootings at Columbine High School in mid-April.

"They saw kids on TV that look just like them. There was a feeling of anxiety," she said.

Detective Christine Schuta, Farmington High School police liaison officer, noted that some students still have some nervousness. "But I think the majority of kids in school feel comfortable and safe."

According to Gary Goss, Farmington Public Safety Director, society — including schools — now has an altered mind-set because of the tragedy.

And it might not be until the next school year before American schools are closer to normal in terms of overall mood and environment, he emphasized.

"I was listening to a radio program, and they talked about how ... this incident disturbed our perception of normalcy," Goss said. "We're out of our comfort zone. Nationwide, it stunned us."

## Kids from page A1

Barrett stressed that rumors and jokes are being taken seriously.

"We're taking a zero tolerance to threats of any kind," he said. "This is not a time for pranks."

Barrett, who has made public address announcements to students and sent letters home to parents to help keep rumors in check, noted the poor timing of the so-called joke.

"If this had happened a couple months ago we wouldn't be talking about it," Barrett said.

According to Farmington police reports, the student brought a toaster to first-hour class for a skit, but classmates were grabbing at it. He then put the toaster into the paper bag, and wrote "Do Not Touch" on the outside of it.

Later in the day, another student asked him what was in the bag. He replied that it was a bomb.

The matter, reported last Thursday, was turned over to the county juvenile court. Such threats, whether made in jest or not, carry a maximum penalty of four years in jail, Myers said.

Previously, rumors of a Littleton-like incident occurring at FHS were diffused, Barrett and

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**Mary Brown**  
—Harrison assistant principal

Myers said the problem began when a student told others about an e-mail received from a Plymouth Salem student.

The e-mail detailed how "things were going to happen" at Salem last Thursday or Friday, Myers said.

But, the Farmington High student "told someone (at FHS) and it was misinterpreted" that FHS was the targeted school, Myers said. "The rumor went through six or seven kids before it was reported. We backtracked and found it was from Plymouth."

Myers said students found out lying about matters that impact school security are "going to be dealt with. We're not going to fool around with that."

Other rumors of violence have taken place at Power Middle School and Harrison High School, but were unsubstantiated.

Mary Brown, Harrison assistant principal, said one incident occurred following a car accident

on 12 Mile Road. A student ran into the school saying someone had been shot.

"People are jumping to conclusions," said Brown, noting that two Harrison students served suspensions. "One (was suspended) for spreading a rumor and one for ... not being in the right place at the right time. We're keeping a close watch on this."

Students, Brown added, "need to be in the proper place."

North Farmington High School officials could not be reached for comment.

Myers said all crisis teams at the district's secondary schools will be visited on Friday, May 14, by an expert on school violence.

On Wednesday, May 13, the community coalition forum "Can It Happen Here?" will take place at the William Costick Activities Center.

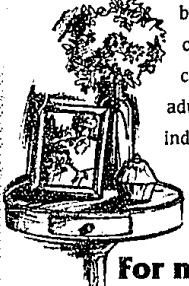
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