

ALL EYES ON COLUMBINE

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SCIENCE

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COLUMBINE HIGH SCHOOL students will be carrying photo IDs and will be watched by video cameras as they enter school on Monday. All the same, students hope to have a normal year.

In the wake of the April tragedy, when 12 students at Littleton, Colorado's Columbine High were killed by two fellow students, school administrators and local law enforcement have joined hands – with each other and with technology – to ensure it never happens again.

But since students themselves were the gunmen in the April shootings, some students are skeptical that the IDs could save them from future violence.

"If this was going to happen again, the ID cards wouldn't stop them. They don't really do any good. I don't know why they want us to wear them," said Sara Schweitzberger, a sophomore at Columbine this year. She was in the downstairs cafeteria during the shootings.

School administrators hope the cards will keep unauthorized individuals out of the school.

"They'll be expected to show them on Monday when they enter the school parking lot on Monday," said Marilyn Saltzman, a spokesperson for Columbine. "It will make sure that people who don't belong in the building are not in the building."

Columbine has also installed 16 surveillance cameras and a keyless entry system for staff members who enter the building after hours, Saltzman said.

With all this surveillance, will Columbine students feel like they're under a microscope?

"I'll just ignore them. I don't think they'll bother me that much," Schweitzberger said. "The cameras will help fights break up but they don't make me nervous, really."

"I will feel just as safe at school as I did two years ago," said Justin Nava, a Columbine student.

"I think they are a bit unnecessary personally, as are the name tags. Kids already have a hard time keeping track of their ID cards, and they certainly don't want to wear them," said Guyia Lindemann, a friend of the Klebold family and cousin of another student.

Other schools around the country are removing lockers, keeping doors locked at all times, and employing armed guards, according to a report from The New York Times on Friday.

Schools are also distributing floor plans and computerized blueprints of school layouts to local police, the Times said. Littleton police were not familiar with the layout of Columbine, which hindered their response to the shootings.

According to Phil Domenica, a sergeant with the Jefferson County Sheriff's Office, police and school administrators formed a School Safety Task Force to coordinate security measures for the school year.

"The committee was put together to address security for all schools in the Jefferson County School District," Domenica said. "We made recommendations to the school board on different types of security measures to be implemented this school year or possibly next year."

The recommendations were made on 9 August and actions will be finalized during a 19 August meeting. In addition to the cameras and ID cards already implemented at Columbine, other recommendations include requiring staff and students to wear their ID badges at all times, increasing the number of campus security officers, and tightening perimeter control at school buildings.

All Jefferson County schools have two campus supervisors who act as unarmed plainclothes guards. Columbine is considering hiring one or two more, Saltzman said.

For at least the next month, she said, the school will employ five rotating guards on a 24-hour basis.

Most schools seem to be taking extra precautions this year even though recent United States Department of Education statistics found that gun-related incidents in the last school year decreased almost one-third from the year before.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention last week announced research finding that teen violence and the number of weapons brought to school was less in the 1990s than in the previous decade.

Nevertheless, Palm Beach County employed SWAT teams to conduct mock-hostage drills replete with fake wounds, helicopters and fake pipe bombs.

Columbine is planning a rally for the first day of school on Monday in the school parking lot, during which school officials will return the American flag to full staff. Jefferson County Police will be on hand to control crowds and traffic, Domenica said.

Throughout the school year, a community resource officer will be on Columbine school grounds, but that's nothing new. One officer has been assigned to each of the five high schools in Jefferson County for the past five years, Domenica said.

Some think Columbine's overdoing it, and that authorities are approaching school problems from the wrong angle.

"This is probably the safest school in the country, just because it is pretty unlikely that this will happen at the same school again. I think everything they are doing is a bit of overkill, especially since everyone should have seen this coming before it even happened," Lindemann said.

"They are just covering up for the fact that they don't pay enough attention to the "outcasts" at that school."

Despite all of the precautions, students hope they'll have a low-key school year.

"I'm not really nervous. I'm excited to get back to normal stuff," Schweitzberger said. "I'm excited just like I always am for the first day of school."