

Cleaned-Up Columbine Reopens Monday; Decision on Fate of Library Remains

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NEW YORK — – On Monday, Brian Anderson will have to take one courageous step.

Four months ago, Anderson, a senior at Columbine High School, was shot three times in the chest by two of his classmates as he approached a door leading to the high school parking lot. On August 16, Brian will have to walk back through that door and start the school year inside the building that was the scene of the worst school shooting in history.

But he won't be alone. Jefferson County school district officials say that, so far, there have been no requests to transfer out of Columbine High School since last spring's shooting. In fact, more than 35 students have applied to transfer into Columbine this year.

To start off the first day back at school, students will walk between rows of parents, alumni and teachers to the grounds of the renovated Columbine High School. There, in the same parking lot where Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold started killing their classmates, Principal Frank DeAngelis will lead a rally to welcome the students back.

Anderson's father says his son is looking forward to Monday. But he is also nervous.

"I know he is anxious to go back to school," said Anderson's father, Bob Warnier, "but what's going to happen the first few days, I have no idea."

Anderson's physical wounds have healed since the shooting on April 20, but many are worried that emotional wounds may resurface when students like Anderson see their old school again. That's why construction workers have been busy this summer trying to erase all signs of Harris' and Klebold's assault.

Last April, Jefferson County sheriff's deputy Steven Davis described an eerie scene inside Columbine High School. "It's like 2,000 people just vanished," he said. "Books are open, backpacks and shoes are everywhere. There's broken glass and knocked-over chairs."

Since the tragedy, the school has undergone a \$1.2 million-dollar face-lift. The hallway carpets that had been ripped by gunfire and stained by blood have been pulled up and replaced by shiny white tiling. Ceiling panels that had been pitted by shrapnel have been replaced by colorful green glass. At the front and side entrances to the school, the Columbine school name and flower have been inlaid in the floor. Community members and students have decorated the walls with 175 hand-painted tiles.

In the cafeteria where Klebold and Harris sprayed gunfire and lobbed explosives, workers have installed new tables and chairs and a fresh coat of paint. Workers have even replaced the school's alarms so students won't ever have to hear the same sound that bleated for hours during last spring's shooting.

"Walking through the school, it looks so much brighter," said Warnier who recently took a tour of the renovated high school. "I think the students will appreciate the brightness."

One place where workers did not try and smooth over the signs of the horrifying day is the library where 12 students were killed. Instead, crews cleared out the room, erected a wall to conceal its entrance and lined that wall with new lockers.

Schoolboard spokesperson Marilyn Saltzman said a decision will be made later about what to do with the room. In the meantime, two trailers holding books and computers will serve as the school's library.

Many feel the students rather than administrators should decide what happens. As Columbine parent Steve Schweitzberger said, "You've got to let the kids feel like they're involved in every decision. That's part of the healing process."

Jami Roubidoux, a Columbine senior, feels the library should be converted into a memorial. Joe Dreaden, who is entering his sophomore year, believes the library should never reopen.

"I think we should close the library for good and lock the doors forever — no one's going to want to go in there," Dreaden said.

There are no formal plans yet for a student group or vote to decide what to do. Once a system is organized, some feel the same student body should have input in other issues the local school board is now debating, including the possibility of a dress code and metal detectors at Columbine.

One other renovation project that may be particularly consoling for Anderson are the 12 new metal doors that workers have installed at the school's entrances. That includes the doors that blocked and partially slowed the impact of the three bullets that struck Anderson on April 20.

The doors that Anderson walks through on Monday should bear no marks. Warnier believes that seeing a healed building will help his son move beyond his own trauma.

"There's going to be a big sigh of relief in this town on that first day of school," he said. "Brian has gone through three years at Columbine, and he'd like to finish up at Columbine."