

# Columbine community reaches out during crisis

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**Mar. 6, 2001** - Rick Kaufman said he had hoped he would never need to dig out all the news releases and statements generated from the first 24 hours after the shootings at Columbine High School.

But that's exactly what he did Monday, when authorities said a 15-year-old freshman opened fire in a suburban San Diego high school, killing two students and wounding 13 others.

The incident at Santana High School in Santee, Calif., resulted in the largest number of dead and wounded in a school shooting since Columbine. Students and staff at Columbine were informed immediately of the shootings and were encouraged to seek professional help if the Santana shootings affected them emotionally.

"It's difficult, not only for that community but for the Columbine community," said Kaufman, executive director of communications services for Jefferson County Public Schools. "We've been in touch with Columbine High School. While the school's doing well, we have made resources available in case the need arises."

The district has no plans to increase security at its schools, Kaufman said, and no district representatives have been asked to travel to the site of the shootings. The district, however, has offered its assistance to Santana High School, Kaufman said. Jefferson County Superintendent Jane Hammond has already talked to her counterpart in Santee. Kaufman said the district has sent copies of all statements, news releases and other helpful materials that were generated during the first 24 hours of Columbine.

"Knowing what we went through in those first 24 hours, they (school and district officials) truly are just trying to keep their head above water," Kaufman said. "The last thing they're thinking about is calling in others to help them out. We just want them to know that we're here to help them if we can."

Beth Nimmo, the mother of Columbine victim Rachel Scott, said Monday that she hadn't been contacted by anyone at Santana High but offered advice to parents and students affected by the shootings.

"I know that for the parents, especially for those who've lost their children, they're going to be so numb for so long," Nimmo said. "My heart really goes out to them. There's such a feeling of helplessness in knowing what to do to bring any kind of comfort. For us, people offered wonderful things and did what they could."

Nimmo said she heard that the gunman at Santana had allegedly boasted of his intent over the weekend to friends, then told them he was only joking. Nimmo said she was disappointed to learn the alleged threats were not reported.

"There's nothing that you can say about those kinds of issues that could be a joke," she said. "I think now you should take those things almost to the same level that you would take airport security. It's hard to know who's going to go over the edge and who won't."

Jeanne Oliver, a spokeswoman for the Jefferson Center for Mental Health, said the group is well-staffed to help people in the area through its Columbine Connections outreach center. One concern Oliver had with the Santana High shooting was the television broadcasts of students fleeing the building - broadcasts that look eerily familiar to those from Columbine. "This kind of an event and these images can retraumatize people, even two years later," Oliver said. "We're real concerned about getting information out to people about what those symptoms might be, about the fact that it's really very normal to feel fear or sadness or not be able to concentrate."

Oliver said anyone who has concerns relating to Columbine or shows signs of retraumatization should seek help. Some signs that trauma has returned are sudden shifts in mood, changes in eating or sleeping habits, and recurring thoughts or nightmares.