

Lots to learn from foiled plots

By Kevin Simpson

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Feb. 16, 2001 - Recently foiled plots for alleged Columbine-style shootings across the country demonstrate how schools and police should react to threatening information, according to legal briefs to be filed today by injured Columbine victims.

Although the observation is basically a footnote to broader legal arguments in the suit against Columbine educators and Jefferson County law enforcement, the coincidence was impossible for Jim Cederberg, attorney for injured student Richard Castaldo and lead author of the brief, to ignore.

One alleged plot involved a student at a San Jose, Calif., junior college and another involved students at a Fort Collins middle school. Both were discovered by authorities before they could unfold.

"Anecdotally, we point out that although these defendants say, 'What could we do about it, how could we sniff it out?' that's exactly what they're doing in other places," Cederberg said.

"The information that started the follow-up that led to the discovery of the California and Fort Collins plots was a lot less than the stuff available on (killers Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold) in the beginning,"

The lawsuit, which also includes claims by injured students Sean Graves, Lance Kirklin and Mark Taylor, hinges in part on the educators' and law enforcement's failure to act despite evidence that a violent plot was in the works.

"You're up late, you get up the next morning, pick up the newspaper, and here's another one," said Cederberg. "And you think, that's what I'm talking about."

In its motion to dismiss the case, attorneys for Columbine High School principal Frank DeAngelis, six teachers and the Jefferson County School District claimed that a federal

appeals court has ruled that public schools aren't required to protect students from each other.

A hearing has been set for April 27.