

## Press Clippings 6/17/2022

### Chicago Tribune

#### Illinois school districts review safety plans after Texas shooting --- 6/17/2022

By Karen Ann Cullotta



Devion Bolling, 21, is congratulated by Jadine Chou, far right, chief safety and security officer at Chicago Public Schools, after his speech on June 16, 2022, at Ulrich Children's Advantage Network in Chicago. Bolling spoke on his experience and all the help he received from mentors. The rally kicked off summer programs aimed at keeping students safe during the summer. (Antonio Perez / Chicago Tribune)

For more than 2 ½ years, the ubiquitous catch phrase “school safety” was inextricably tied to COVID-19 protocol requiring masking, social distancing and a slate of other virus mitigation strategies at Illinois schools throughout the pandemic.

But the recent school shooting at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas, in which 19 students and two teachers were killed, was a jarring reminder to Illinois educators and law enforcement that school safety plans to prevent and respond to violent incidents remain a priority, despite the lingering pandemic.

“We are always thinking about safety, but the incident in Uvalde was a reminder to us that we need to make sure everything we already have is sufficient,” said Jadine Chou, chief safety and security officer at Chicago Public Schools.

“Even without a catastrophic incident, as an urban school district, we face this every day, with shots fired in neighborhoods outside our schools,” Chou said. “We have 636 schools,

and every plan is customized. We have relationships with every single principal. ... School safety is not just a check-the-box thing.”

The arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic and shuttering of schools across Illinois in March 2020 paused some components of school safety plans, including active shooter drills and hard lockdown rehearsals, as students and teachers pivoted to virtual classrooms. And even after students and teachers returned to school buildings during the 2020-21 school year, hybrid instruction and COVID regulations posed challenges for existing pre-pandemic violence prevention safety plans and training programs.

But educators and law enforcement authorities said this week that although some components of school safety plans were modified during the pandemic — how do you practice lockdown drills when students and teachers are not in the school building? — the May 24 school shooting in Texas underscores the importance of a recent update of the state’s threat assessment law.

Passed by lawmakers in 2019, the legislation requires schools statewide to create a threat assessment team and to develop protocols to prevent and mitigate school violence. Last month, the law was updated to demand the state’s roughly 850 school districts submit their plans to one of the 38 Illinois regional offices of education at the start of the 2022-23 school year.

“Every second that we do not take action is a second wasted,” said Kathi Griffin, president of the Illinois Education Association, the state’s largest teachers union, which proposed the threat assessment legislation and supported the move to require school safety plans be submitted.

“All education stakeholders, teachers, education support professionals, counselors, psychologists, administrators, community members, students and local law enforcement should be working collaboratively this summer to develop a threat assessment plan,” Griffin said.

She said educators and law enforcement also are “working to find solutions for districts that may not have the necessary resources to put safety measures in place.”

“This will allow our students and educators to return to school this fall focusing on learning instead of worrying if there will be a mass shooting in their school or, worse yet, in their classroom,” Griffin said.

Illinois educators’ concerns about violence prevention is being echoed at school districts across the U.S., said Kenneth Trump, president of the Cleveland-based National School Safety and Security Services.

“For more than two years, ‘school safety’ has become synonymous with ‘COVID safety,’” Trump said.

“Schools had to modify their plans to the reality. ... How do you practice a traditional lockdown and follow social distancing?” Trump said.

“We’ve also found that administrators have been so busy, focused on COVID and dealing with the social emotional wellness and stress facing students and teachers, some people didn’t even have the time to dust off their plans,” Trump said.

An exodus of teachers and support staff employees, including bus drivers and teacher assistants, during the pandemic also has posed challenges for school administrators, who need to ensure both veteran educators and new hires understand a school’s violence prevention and mitigation safety plans.

“People who work in schools are burned out, but this is not the meeting you can push aside,” Trump said.

Well-funded school districts across the U.S. have the financial resources to equip their school buildings with the latest security technology, including installing more cameras, new entry door hardware and in some cases, metal detectors, Trump said.

But Trump, a security specialist who has served as an expert witness during civil litigation stemming from school shootings in recent years, said the focus on so-called fortifying building security should not detract from the importance of three key strategies: plan, prepare and practice.

Strong partnerships between schools and local law enforcement are foundational to a school safety plan, said Trump, who added that the only armed school employees should be “trained and certified police officers.”

“Our teachers should only be armed with technology and textbooks,” he said.

Tony Sanders, the superintendent of Elgin-based Unit School District 46, said the only immediate safety change made after the Uvalde shooting was ensuring the district’s local police departments have a master key to all doors in a building.

While police already have key fob access to buildings, Sanders said, “The key further ensures there is not a delay in responding.”

The district is also considering spending \$226,000 for interior cameras in the seven middle schools that do not have them, Sanders said, and it plans to hire 10 additional social workers or guidance counselors to provide more social and emotional supports to middle school students.

The moves to enhance security technology and increase staffing were “decisions made before Uvalde,” Sanders said.

At Arlington Heights-based Township High School District 214, Superintendent David Schuler said officials already had been reviewing their safety plans prior to the Uvalde shooting.

Although the district still plans to continue following the practice known as “Run. Hide. Fight,” Schuler said the district is providing additional mental health supports for students hit hardest by the pandemic, and is well aware “that even doing a drill can be a trigger” for some.

Illinois law enforcement authorities, including local police and sheriff’s departments, are strengthening their partnerships with school districts this summer and addressing the inequities that can arise due to geography and funding disparities.

“Unfortunately, the horrible incident that happened in Texas is leading us to reevaluate what we’re doing, what we’re not and what can be done better,” said Jim Kaitschuk, executive director of the Springfield-based Illinois Sheriffs’ Association.

“And one of the facts that has given us pause is when it comes to schools, there’s so much diversity in terms of services across the state,” Kaitschuk said.

School districts in suburban DuPage County benefit from their proximity to both police and sheriff’s departments, while small, rural districts across Illinois have limited budgets and often have long distances between schools and first responders.

“Without creating some sort of blue-ribbon panel, we need to talk about what things can we put in place that cost nothing?” Kaitschuk said. “School safety plans also need to be living documents, not just something that sits on a shelf.”

At Elk Grove Village-based Community Consolidated School District 59, which has 12 elementary schools and three junior high schools, Assistant Superintendent of Business Services Ron O’Connor said that “despite COVID, our school safety plan was never on the back burner.”

The district recently spent \$700,000 on a new camera system, and officials are considering hiring a consultant to review the district’s school safety plans and suggest improvements.

O’Connor said the district is also considering ALICE training — short for Alert, Lockdown, Inform, Counter and Evacuate — a program that’s used at hundreds of elementary and high schools across the U.S. and that aims to prepare teachers, and in some cases students, in the event of an aggressive intruder or an active shooter in a school building.

For most educators, reviewing school safety plans is not just a matter of compliance, but a task of the utmost importance.

“When Sandy Hook happened, I had two little ones about the same age of those students. ... I went home that day and cried for 45 minutes straight,” O’Connor said of the 2012

elementary school mass shooting in Newtown, Connecticut. “Every time I walk down a hallway at one of our schools, I ask myself, ‘Would my kids be safe here?’”

On Thursday, Chou of CPS joined state officials and social service providers at a rally kicking off a raft of programs aimed at keeping students safe during the summer.

The new programs include social services for students and their families, and paid employment for students in their own neighborhoods. It also includes an initiative called “Back to Our Future,” which aims to stem the impact of the pandemic on youth and reduce firearm violence.

Last month, Gov. J.B. Pritzker announced a \$16.2 million program that plans to work with 1,000 “disconnected youth” to help them successfully reengage in school.

“Just like we need to get COVID vaccines and boosters, we have to figure out a way we can inoculate our young people against the trauma and violence they are going through and living with every day,” Chou said.

## **Chicago Tribune/The Courier-News Streamwood’s Natalia Colin makes professional debut at 17 years old in Mexico and scores first goal. ‘It has been amazing so far.’ --- 6/16/2022**

**By Patrick Z. McGavin for Aurora Beacon-News**



Former Streamwood standout Natalia Colin is a captain for Mexico's U-17 national team that qualified for the World Cup this October in India. (Photo provided by the Colin family)

Natalia Colin has played out the last year of her life in hyperdrive.

“It has been like nothing I have ever experienced,” she said before adding, “it has been a dream come true.”

A year ago, Colin was a sophomore at **Streamwood**, emerging as one of the best high school girls’ soccer players in Illinois.

She scored 25 goals and added 10 assists during an abbreviated season.

Now, Colin is a forward playing for Deportivo Toluca F.C. Femenil as part of the Liga MX Femenil, the highest-level women’s professional league in Mexico.

“It has been a hard process since I left Streamwood,” she said. “There are a lot of obstacles you have to go through, especially with the travel.

“It has been amazing so far.”

Just as significantly, Colin is a member of Mexico’s U-17 national team that qualified for the World Cup that opens play in October in India. She’s leaving next week for a 10-day tournament in Italy.

Colin’s father, Luis, was born in Mexico City. Her mother, Norma, was born in Chicago but has family roots in Michoacán.

Natalia is one of several American-born players on Mexico’s U-17 national team.

The middle of three daughters, she lived in Mexico for a year as a child. That marked the beginning of her soccer career.

“She was in ballet, dance,” Norma said of her daughter. “She was always doing different sports.

“She was only 3 years old and I enrolled her in a beginner’s class during the year we lived in Mexico. It was an all-boys program for 5-year-olds.”

Norma remembers Natalia posing with first soccer ball at age 3.

“I talked with the coach,” Norma said. “He said he saw things in Natalia he didn’t see in the 5-year-old boys. She played her first game at 4 years old. She hasn’t stopped playing since.”

After her freshman season at Streamwood was canceled due to the pandemic, Natalia scored nine goals in her first eight games with the Sabres.

**Streamwood coach Matt Polovin** was immediately impressed by her presence, vision and playmaking talent.

Polovin coaches both the boys and girls programs at Streamwood. Natalia already was at a different level.





**Natalia Colin dribbles the ball during a training session with Deportivo Toluca F.C. Femenil of the Liga MX Femenil, the highest-level professional league in Mexico. (Photo provided by the Colin family)**

“Sometimes, I thought I was watching Magic Johnson out there,” Polovin said. “She’d make these no-look passes that were just amazing. She was doing stuff I haven’t seen a lot of the guys do.

“She was just so comfortable with the ball. She was beating people with ease.”

Right away, Polovin realized Natalia was a special talent who was simply too good for the high school level. She needed a greater outlet for her ability.

Natalia also had greater ambitions about the next stage of her career.

“My daughter has always been so mature,” Norma said. “She knows what she wants. She knows where she is going. She is very passionate and works hard for it. She is different.”

Natalia lives in a special dormitory in the stadium complex in Toluca. As the second youngest player on the team, she remains under adult supervision.

Natalia, who’s completing her high school academic requirements online, reflected on the profound changes in her life over the last 13 months.

“My game has changed since I left Streamwood,” she said. “I have grown physically and mentally.

“Just learning from the people here, having professional coaching and watching the men’s and women’s national teams have been really beneficial.”

Natalia’s success has only emboldened her, justifying the decision to make the professional leap.

“It’s hard being over here by myself,” she said. “I miss my family and my dogs. Birthdays and holidays are tough, but I have learned to live with it.

“I call my parents and my sisters every day and that has helped me learn to deal with things.”

So far, Natalia has scored two goals in her professional career.

“The maturity of my game is just different,” she said. “I see the game in a wholly different way. Being here, traveling, playing on television and living my dream has just been amazing.”

With changes to eligibility regarding compensation and endorsement deals, Natalia said college remains a top priority after her World Cup experience.

“I’m working to get to a higher level,” she said. “I want to be an even better player, the kind of player that other girls look up to.”