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With security measures, urban schools avoid mass shootings

By Corey Williams

DETROIT (AP) - Alondra Alvarez lives about five minutes from her high school on Detroit's southwest side but she drives there instead of walking because her mother fears for her safety. Once the 18-year-old enters the building, her surroundings take on a more secure feel almost immediately as she passes through a bank of closely monitored metal detectors.

"My mom has never been comfortable with me walking to school. My mom is really scared of street thugs," said Alvarez, who attends Western International.

As schools around the U.S. look for ways to impose tougher security measures in the wake of last month's school shooting in Parkland, Florida, that left 17 people dead, they don't have to look further than urban districts such as Detroit, Chicago, Los Angeles and New York that installed metal detectors and other security in the 1980s and 1990s to combat gang and drug violence.

Security experts believe these measures have made urban districts less prone to mass shootings, which have mostly occurred in suburban and rural districts.

Officials in some suburban and rural school districts are now considering detectors as they rethink their security plans after the shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, where 19-year-old former student Nikolas Cruz allegedly brought in a duffel bag containing an assault rifle and opened fire. He's charged with 17 counts of first-degree murder and 17 counts of attempted murder.

The massacre has galvanized thousands of students around the country who walked out of their classrooms for 17 minutes - one for each Parkland victim - on March 14 to protest gun violence.

"I think urban schools are eons ahead. They've been dealing with violence a lot longer than suburban schools," said Philip Smith, president of the National African American Gun Association.

During the mid-1980s, Detroit was one of the first districts in the nation to put permanent, walk-through metal detectors in high schools and middle schools. New York schools also had them in some buildings.

By 1992, metal detectors had been installed in a few dozen Chicago high schools. And in 1993, under pressure to make schools safer, Los Angeles' district announced that it would randomly search students with metal detectors.

Such measures "are designed to identify and hopefully deter anybody from bringing a weapon to school, but metal detectors alone portray an illusion of being safe," said Nikolai Vitti, superintendent of the 50,000-student Detroit Public Schools Community District.

"Our schools need to be safer than they are," Vitti said. "As a nation, we need to fully fund and make sure all districts can adequately staff school resource officers and also offer mental health and first-aid training to all educators."

Security measures don't always keep guns off school grounds. A 17-year-old high school senior was killed and another student wounded March 7 in a Birmingham, Alabama, classroom shooting. Metal detectors at the school were not in use that day. A 17-year-old student has been charged with manslaughter.

Two students were shot and three people suffered other injuries in February when a gun in a backpack accidentally fired inside a Los Angeles Unified School District middle school. The district does random metal-detector wand searches daily in middle schools and high schools. A 12-year-old girl has been charged with being a minor in possession of a firearm and having a weapon on school grounds.

In response to the Parkland shooting, Florida's governor has said he wants to spend \$500 million to increase law enforcement and mental health counselors at schools, to make buildings more secure with metal detectors and to create an anonymous tip line.

A package of legislation passed by the New York state Senate includes provisions for metal detectors and improved security technology in schools. A parent in Knox County, Kentucky, has said his law office would donate \$25,000 for metal detectors in schools there.

Alvarez, the student at Detroit's Western International, said she and others who attend the school go through metal detectors every morning. Her elementary and middle schools also had metal detectors.

"I've always seen it as something that made me feel safe," she said, adding that all schools should have them and not just inner-city ones "so students don't feel discriminated against."

Metal detectors are seen as a symptom of a "stigma that already exists," said Mark Fancher, staff attorney for the American Civil Liberties Union of Michigan's Racial Justice Project.

"There is a presumption that urban schools - particularly those with students of color - are violent places and security demands you have procedures in place that are intended to protect the safety of the students," Fancher said.

But metal detectors, property searches, security guards and police in schools create conditions similar to those found in prisons, he said.

"Students, themselves, internalize these things," Fancher said. "If you create a school that looks like a prison, the people who go there will pretty much decide that's what is expected of them."

Many urban districts have a greater awareness and sensitivity when it comes to students' needs, said Kenneth Trump, president of the Cleveland-based National School Safety and Security Services, a K-12 security consulting firm.

"I think in urban schools, the approach of most of the educators, administrators and security personnel is, 'We realize there are issues kids bring to school,'" said Trump, who has been in the school safety field for more than 30 years. "The people will tell you, 'We are not in denial ... we acknowledge our problems. We just don't have enough resources to deal with it.'"

Suburban and rural administrators, parents and students often view themselves as different from their big-city counterparts, and that may impact how they treat school security, he said.

"There's very often that divide of 'There's us and there's them. We're not the urban district. We are the alternative. We're the place people go to get away from the urban district,'" he said.

Associated Press writer Jesse Holland in Washington contributed to this report.



From left-right) NNPA Foundation Chair Amelia Ashley-Ward, Senator Kamala Harris (D-Calif.), NNPA Chairman Dorothy Leavell and Dr. Benjamin F. Chavis Jr., take a photo during a ceremony honoring Harris with the NNPA's Newsmaker of the Year Award on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C. Harris is the second African American woman senator in United States history.

The Black Press Honors Senator Kamala Harris with 2018 Newsmaker of the Year Award

By Stacy M. Brown (NNPA Newswire Contributor)

United States Senator Kamala D. Harris (D-Calif.) received the National Newspaper Publishers Association's (NNPA) 2018 Newsmaker of the Year Award, during a recent ceremony on Capitol Hill.

The NNPA is a trade group that represents more than 200 Black-owned media companies that reach more than 20 million readers in print and online every week. Dozens of NNPA member publishers traveled to Washington, D.C. to celebrate Black Press Week.

"The theme of this year's Black Press Week is 'Celebrating 191 Years of the Black Press of America: Publishing Truth to Empower,'" according to a press release about the gathering. "Black publishers, media professionals, civil rights leaders and lawmakers from across the country attend the annual event."

Harris, a graduate of Howard University and the University of California Hastings College of Law, is the second African American woman senator in U.S. history.

"My friend and fellow freedom fighter and heroine should be honored and I'm so proud to be here to present this award," said NNPA Foundation Chair and San Francisco Sun Reporter publisher Amelia Ashley-Ward.

Ashley-Ward said that she remembered when Senator Harris was campaigning to become the district attorney in San Francisco, more than a decade ago. When the race got tough, Ashley-Ward said that the Black community and the Black Press rallied around Harris.

"The Sun Reporter rented a cable car. We put some powerful women leaders on that cable car with you," Ashley-Ward said, speaking directly to Harris. "We took you all over the city...you told your story, you were running against the White establishment...Kamala won handily in that race and she's been on a meteoric rise, since then."

As San Francisco's district

attorney, Harris worked to "reduce recidivism by offering nonviolent, low-level drug trafficking defendants job training and other life skills education as an alternative to jail," according to The Los Angeles Times. Her office reported that during the first two years of the program, "less than 10 percent of those who graduated from the program were reoffenders — compared to 53 percent of drug offenders statewide who returned to prison or jail within two years of release."

As California's Attorney General, Harris, "joined other state attorneys general in brokering a \$25-billion nationwide settlement deal with the nation's five largest mortgage institutions for improper foreclosure practices during the recent housing market crash," The Los Angeles Times reported.

During a recent Judiciary Committee hearing, Harris, "criticized President Trump's proposal to arm teachers...following the deadly school shooting in Parkland, Fla., saying it doesn't make sense," The Hill reported. Harris also praised students who have risen up to push lawmakers to enact new gun safety measures.

Ashley-Ward encouraged attendees to read Harris' biography online before adding: "The real reason you are who are is because you didn't forget where you came from."

Dorothy Leavell, the chairman of the NNPA and publisher of the Crusader Newspapers in Chicago and Gary, Ind., called 2018 "the year of the woman."

Leavell said that to honor Harris as the Newsmaker of the Year was just another one of the perks of being the chairman of the NNPA.

"We are proud of you and we are with you and all of our Congressional Black Caucus members," said Leavell, speaking directly to Harris.

The junior United States Senator said that she was "incredibly honored" to accept the award,

particularly from Ashley-Ward and the Black Press, whom she acknowledged as truth tellers and guardians of information.

"This is a room full of leaders," Harris told the crowd gathered in the Rayburn House Office Building. "And, when you can connect your past to your present and have those connections remain strong, it's very empowering."

In a powerful 12-minute acceptance speech, Harris spoke of the importance of unifying a nation divided by racism and classism.

Harris said that it's important to understand that "we all come from somewhere and it's important that we remember from whence we came."

The Black Press best represents the vehicle in which real and important stories can and have been told, Harris said.

"The Sun-Reporter and all the Black newspapers know that the best way our voices can be heard is when we use our voices to tell our stories instead of leaving others to tell it," she said. "The Black press always played a role in making sure that our community has something it can trust."

Harris, raised in Oakland, Calif., made history when she became, "the first woman, the first African American and first Indian American in California history to be elected state attorney general," when she defeated Steve Cooley in the 2010 election, according to the San Francisco Chronicle.

Congressional Black Caucus Chairman Cedric Richmond (D-La.) praised Harris as someone who hasn't taken her eyes off the prize—she see's the big picture, he said.

"The U.S. Senate used to be a billionaire's club, a boy's club, a White man's club," said Richmond. "Now we have a strong woman, a [strong individual in the Senate] and it's important that our kids see someone that they can be like."

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N Carolina African-American veteran dies at age 100

RALEIGH (AP) - A North Carolina woman believed to be one of the last African-American women to serve overseas during World War II has died at the age of 100.

Haywood Funeral Home in Raleigh said on its website that Millie Dunn Veasey died March 9 and was buried at Raleigh National Cemetery. Her niece, Elsie Thompson, told WUNC that her aunt's "heart was tired."

After she graduated from high school in 1942, Veasey enlisted in what was called the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps. Her unit was the only all-black, all-female battalion to serve overseas during World War II.

Veasey served in France and England with the unit, which sorted and routed mail for millions of American service members and civilians.

She later became the first female president of the Raleigh NAACP.

27 cases started by officer accused in beating video dropped

ASHEVILLE (AP) - A North Carolina prosecutor has dropped 27 cases initiated by a white police officer shown on video beating a black man accused of jaywalking.

Buncombe County District Attorney Todd Williams tells the Citizen Times in a March 12 statement that former Asheville police Officer Christopher Hickman could not be considered a credible witness.

The 31-year-old was arrested on felony assault and other charges in the August incident. The Associated Press was unable to reach him by phone March 9.

Williams says the dropped cases involved 17 defendants and included felonies and DWIs. They did not include violent felonies or sex offenses. More cases could be dropped as prosecutors analyze convictions obtained using Hickman's testimony.

County courthouse records staff say a list of the dropped cases was not immediately available.

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