



Feature

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PHONY "SWATTING CALL" SENDS WBCSD INTO LOCKDOWN

Olivia Naber
Head Editor-in-Chief

Less than two weeks after the Perry High School shooting, West Branch entered lockdown after receiving anonymous school shooting threats.

At 2:14 p.m. on Wednesday, January 17th, the WBHS office received an anonymous call warning of a potential school shooting threat. Immediately, high school principal Sara Oswald notified staff and students through the public announcement system of an emergency in the building. She instructed students to stay in the closest classroom without further instruction.

Within minutes, law enforcement from several agencies arrived on the scene to investigate.

Superintendent Marty Jimmerson emailed staff and families at 2:37 to explain and clarify the situation.

The email read, "Staff, we recently received a phone call of a perceived threat of shooting out at the high school. This was a robo call and has went out to other schools throughout the state. We have contacted Cedar County and they are at the high school at this time. We will stay in lockdown until we get this resolved and will send something to families ASAP. Thank you."

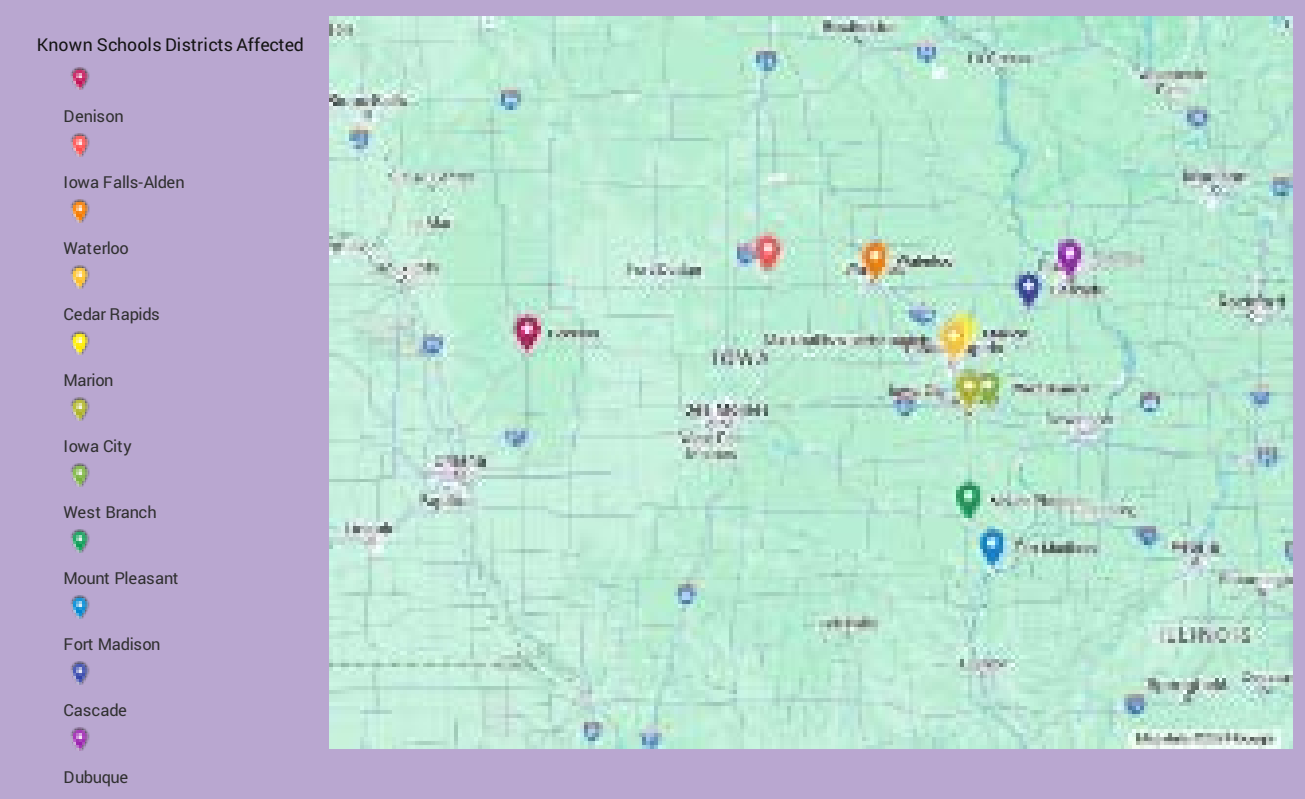
Students stayed sequestered in classrooms with rumors and speculation for information.

"Every single group chat I was in was blowing up...taking pictures and all these videos of the cops with big guns," sophomore Lincoln Naber said.

After the Perry High School shooting, uncertainty over the situation put numerous students on edge.

"Once I started seeing the cops coming, I actually got kind of scared...I just felt like if there was an active

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shooter, there was no chance I was making it," sophomore Ava Abdagic said.

Eventually, the email sent by Jimmerson made its way around to students through teachers, social media, and word of mouth. Knowing the threat was likely a hoax calmed the situation for some.

Naber said, "First, it was kind of worrying, but it got to the point where nothing was really happening. You're like, 'I'm trying to get to English. School's going to be out soon.'"

At 2:50, law enforcement determined the threat was not credible, being

one of several hoax calls sent to schools across the state. After sweeping the school once more, the lockdown ended.

Oswald made an announcement at 3:10 stating that the all-clear had been given and students were free to leave the school.

West Branch was not the only district to enter lockdown. Within the same day, several other Iowa schools received what is known as a swatting call. Swatting calls are hoax calls reporting serious crimes intended to trigger immediate deployment of law enforcement and emergency services to an area.

This isn't the first time mass swatting calls targeted Iowa schools. In March 2023, over 30 Iowa schools entered lockdown after receiving swatting calls that were likely from the same person or group of people. As a whole, 39 instances of swatting occurred in Iowa

schools during the 2022-23 school year, a sharp uptick from 2021's 4 calls.

Currently, swatting is classified as a misdemeanor in Iowa, but the increasing number of swatting calls prompted Iowa legislators to push for harsher punishments.

The recently-introduced House File 2165 would make knowingly reporting false information of a violent crime, an act of terrorism, possession of biological agents or diseases, or threats of arson/explosive devices to fire departments or law enforcement

a Class D Felony with a punishment of up to five years in prison and a fine of \$1,025-\$10,245. If the call leads to the serious injury or death of another person, this is bumped up to a Class C Felony with a punishment of up to 10 years in prison and a fine of \$1,370-\$13,660.



Above: 12 total law enforcement vehicles arrived within two-ten minutes between the three school buildings. Photo by Olivia Naber.



FEELING BLUE

Above: During the January 11 home basketball games against Wilton, the WBHS student section sported blue apparel in solidarity with Perry, Iowa, after the school shooting that claimed three lives, including Perry High School Principal Dan Marburger, and injured six. Photo by Olivia Naber.



THE BEAR STAFF BOX

THE BEAR
Contact: 319-643-7219 ext. 324
900 W. Main St., West Branch, IA 52358
thebear@west-branch.k12.ia.us

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