

Tohatchi High School lockdown

Written by By Cody Begaye Sun Correspondent
Friday, 04 October 2019 10:01



Reports of shots fired. No active shooter found.

The first day of fall turned into an alarming one for Tohatchi residents.

At an unspecified time Sept. 23, Navajo Nation Police responded to a call about an unknown male individual intending to harm himself at Tohatchi High School.

The school was placed on lockdown, and units from multiple jurisdictions responded to the incident, according to Navajo Nation Police. The assisting units included McKinley County Sheriff's Office and New Mexico State Police.

People in the area stated that they heard shots fired at the scene, leading to word of a possible active shooter circulating on social media. There were also witnesses who said they saw smoke coming from one of the buildings.

The McKinley County Sheriff's Office and Gallup-McKinley County Schools Superintendent Mike Hyatt both stated these claims were incorrect. They said there was not an active shooter on campus, nor was there a fire.

"This afternoon staff and students heard a gunshot," Hyatt said Sept. 23. "The gunshot heard

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allegedly came from a police officer's gun near the school campus."

Students from Tohatchi High School and Tohatchi Middle School were escorted to Tohatchi Elementary School as a precautionary measure, where they followed release procedures implemented by the police and district staff, Hyatt said.

While multiple witnesses reported hearing several gunshots fired at the school, McKinley County Undersheriff James Maiorano said no suspect fired a weapon.

The person who allegedly discharged the firearm in question has not been identified, nor has the number of gunshots been disclosed by authorities.

Witnesses described children stampeding through hallways. They said they believed a number of students were trampled in the commotion. Again, authorities and the district did not officially disclose the number of any possible injuries.

One witness, Marv Chavez, of Gallup, said the scene at Tohatchi was chaotic when parents were arriving to pick up their children.

"The scene was so unorganized when parents were blocking the school entrance and emergency services couldn't get through," Chavez said.

Nevertheless, school buses were able to make it through to their respective lanes to transport the students.

District students were all safely released by 5:20 pm. Navajo police and associate law enforcement units are continuing their investigation.

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“Thank you to the police officers who helped our students and staff during this incident,” Hyatt said. “We also thank our Tohatchi staff and students for responding appropriately in this situation.”

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