

Parents demand answers

■ Hundreds tell district to find out who's behind string of bomb threats at two Babylon schools

BY LAURA ALBANESE

Special to Newsday

About 800 parents filled the seats and lined the back wall of West Babylon Senior High School's auditorium yesterday to discuss a spate of bomb threats since Nov. 12 — one at the junior high school and four at the high school — and to demand that administrators step up security and find who is responsible.

Emotions were high during the special meeting, which lasted more than two hours, as parents expressed fear and anger, as well as gratitude for quick response to the threats.

Margaret Valsechi, 43, of West Babylon, whose daughter attends the high school, said she doesn't believe the administration has communicated effectively with students

"The kids need to be heard," she said. "They are scared. They do not want to go to school."

Superintendent Anthony Cacciola told parents he is trying to re-establish a sense of normalcy. Tomorrow's school day, he said, "would be business as usual."

More than a few parents, however, said that until administrators can reasonably prove that it's safe, their children will be staying home.

No one has been injured in the incidents, which are the subject of investigation by Suffolk police First Squad detectives.

The first occurred at West Babylon Junior High School on Nov. 12, when a written bomb threat was found in a bathroom and students were evacuated.

The other four threats all occurred at the high school, on Nov. 14 and on Wednesday, Thursday and Friday. Two of



PHOTO BY FRANK KOESTER

Parent Louise Curci speaks at a meeting yesterday about bomb threats that have plagued two West Babylon schools.

STRING OF EVACUATIONS

Recent threats at West Babylon schools

NOV. 12 West Babylon Junior High School is evacuated at 1:15 p.m. after a written bomb threat is found in a bathroom. Students return to school at 1:55.

NOV. 14 West Babylon Senior High School is locked down and then evacuated at 11 a.m. after a message in marker is found on the wall of a boys' bath-

room. Students return to class at about 11:45 a.m.

WEDNESDAY West Babylon Senior High School is evacuated after a written bomb threat is found on piece of loose-leaf paper in a bathroom. To keep them warm, students are taken on buses to the depot behind South Bay Elementary School. The evacuation lasts about an hour.

THURSDAY West Babylon Senior High School is locked down and then evacuated after a note is found in a hallway at 9:55 a.m. Students again are taken on buses to the depot behind the elementary school. Classes resume at 10:45.

FRIDAY West Babylon Senior High School is evacuated at 11 a.m. after a message in marker is found scrawled on the wall of a stairway landing. Students wait in a nearby athletic field until they are allowed back in the building at 12:10 p.m.

those involved threats scrawled on walls, and two involved written notes found in the school. Students were evacuated each time a threat was discovered; on each of the days, classes resumed after police and school staff searched the building.

At yesterday's meeting, high school principal Ellice Vassallo said school officials are aware of several "persons of interest" in connection with the threats.

Cacciola said teachers are sending samples of some students' handwriting to the school

office. Asked by parents to describe the handwritten threats or show a sample, the officials declined, citing the investigation.

Cacciola, asked after the meeting about the gathering of handwriting samples, said, "The teachers were doing it on their own with [students'] work they already had."

The superintendent also said that district officials had consulted an attorney about the gathering of handwriting samples.

Asked whether teachers were instructed to send handwriting

samples to the school office and whether students or parents had been told about the gathering of samples, Cacciola said that information was confidential.

Asked generally about schools' examination of student handwriting samples, Brett A. Sokolow, an expert in the federal law that governs how schools can use information about students, said the school's actions probably would not violate the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act.

After the Virginia Tech mass-

acre last year, the Education Department gave schools latitude "to act first" to respond to emergencies "and worry" later, said Sokolow, who is not involved in the West Babylon situation.

At the meeting, many parents applauded the quick response to the incidents, but others complained that a class of about 21 students was left in a high school chemistry lab during the Nov. 14 evacuation. School officials apologized for that oversight.

Staff writer Matthew Chayes contributed to this story.

Mom killed by hit-run SUV; son hurt

BY KEITH HERBERT AND MATTHEW CHAYES

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A mom crossing an Inwood road with her 6-year-old son was killed by a hit-and-run driver whose SUV knocked her to the ground and rolled over her body, Nassau County police said yesterday.

The boy survived the Friday afternoon tragedy. He had some leg pain, but he was not seriously injured and now is with his father, police said.

The sport utility vehicle struck the woman, Victoria Cuadros, 29, of Redfern Avenue, about 4:55 p.m., about 20 min-

utes after sunset. She was at Morris Avenue at Doughty Boulevard when the vehicle turned left onto Morris from Doughty, striking her and her son in the crosswalk, police said.

"It kept going," said Det. Lt. Kevin Smith, the chief spokesman for the Nassau police.

Someone followed the SUV, Smith said, but lost track of the vehicle after several blocks. The witness did not get the SUV's license plate, he said. The SUV is described as a maroon or brown late-model Chevrolet or GMC, a Tahoe or Yukon, with dark-tinted windows, oversized tires and



Victoria Cuadros

shiny chrome wheels.

Cuadros was taken by helicopter to Nassau University Medical Center in East Meadow, where she was pronounced dead at 9:23 p.m., police said. The boy's name has not been made public by police.

Family friend Harold Monje, 25, said Cuadros worked at a day-care center and was from Colombia.

Monje and another family friend said the child's name is Nicholas and that he hadn't been told his mother was dead. "It's painful," Monje said. "We're trying to protect him."

Max's Pizza, near the crash

What they're looking for

Police say the SUV they are looking for is a maroon or brown late-model Chevrolet or GMC, a Tahoe or Yukon, with dark-tinted windows, oversized tires and shiny chrome wheels.

The police homicide squad asking anyone with information about the incident to call the hotline at 800-244-TIPS. All calls are kept confidential.

scene, where friends say the boy's father worked, was closed yesterday.

"Closed today for mourning," a sign on the shop read.

The police homicide squad is asking anyone with information to call 800-244-TIPS. All calls are kept confidential.

The family and friends made a personal appeal for the hit-and-run driver to come forward.

"[We] are begging and pleading — please confess," Monje said. "This has been a murder of a wonderful woman who left behind a child."