

Public schools install metal detectors to deter violence

(AP) — It's back to school time, which means new clothes, new classes and — in these violent times — more metal detectors, surveillance cameras, gun-sniffing dogs, book-bag bans and locker searches to keep kids from toting guns.

Seventy percent of the nation's 50 largest school districts have installed metal scanners to detect firearms, up from 25 percent two years ago, according to the National School Safety Center. But preventative measures are also becoming the norm in suburban and rural areas.

"There is no school district now that is immune, whether you're rural, suburban or city," said Peter Blauvelt of the National Association of School Safety and Law Enforcement Officers.

No national figures exist to underscore the depth of gun-related killings in schools, although a study is due in January by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Just as it tracks outbreaks of flu, the CDC is tracking the rate of death in schools from guns. And preliminary numbers show 102 homicides and suicides in and around schools in the past two years — a number that suggests an epidemic.

"An epidemic is what public health officials use whenever there is an unprecedented increase in the rate of death. Clearly, the increase in rates of firearm-related injury and death in and around schools warrants calling it an epidemic," said Patrick Kachur, an epidemiologist in the CDC's Division of Violence Prevention.

In a 1993 survey by the Metropolitan Life Insurance Co., more than one in 10 teachers and one in four students reported they had been victims of violence in or around school. Thirteen percent of the students said

they had brought a weapon to school at least once.

Educators are fighting back, not only with equipment, but with programs such as peer intervention and conflict resolution to prevent disagreements from turning deadly.

Such programs are now being used, for example, in Upper Perkiomen High School outside Philadelphia. In 1993, a 10th grader pulled a 9mm Ruger from his book bag and killed a classmate during first period biology class because, as he told police, "he punches me and kicks me and makes me look like an ass."

Conflict-resolution programs are also in place at the Margaret Leary Elementary School in Butte, Mont. Last April, an 11-year-old boy was killed in the schoolyard by a 10-year-old classmate, who fired a gun at another youth following an argument.

IRA calls for cease-fire

BALLYHALBERT, Northern Ireland (AP) — Twenty miles southeast of the protests and tension of Belfast, Pat Montgomery surveyed the sweeping golden beach outside her studio and delivered her verdict on the IRA cease-fire.

"All sane-thinking Protestants want to give (peace) a go," said the Protestant artist, whose paintings capture the undulating hills and dramatic seascapes of the verdant Ards peninsula.

"Maybe the IRA really have changed this time."

Other Protestants on this prosperous and peaceful finger of land agree it is time for unionists to take the Irish Republican Army on trust and seek reconciliation.

"The (Protestant) loyalist paramilitaries must disarm now and allow the politicians to negotiate for peace," said Walter Kelly as he and wife Joan admired yachts at a luxurious new marina at Bangor, just north of Ballyhalbert.

Others want British troops removed from Northern Ireland and an end to the British government's ban that prevents the media from broadcasting the voices of Sinn Fein, the IRA's political allies.

None of that washes on the shabby streets of the Shankill and other Protestant working-class "ghettoes" that stand hard by the IRA's bases in Catholic neighborhoods.

Here, most people dismiss the cease-fire as a cynical IRA ploy, and they predict it will not last.

Overwhelmingly they back extremists like the Rev. Ian Paisley, who rails against "papists" and accuses the British government of treachery for its contacts with the IRA and Sinn Fein.

A poll last week by the Dublin-based Marketing Research Co. showed only 9 percent of Northern Ireland Protestants believe the cease-fire is permanent, while 75 percent are convinced the IRA will respond to loyalist murders by rejoining the conflict.

Population Conference meets in Cairo

U.N. leaders defend abortion, stress slowing birth rate

CAIRO, Egypt (AP) — One of the world's few women leaders struck back at the Vatican and Muslim fundamentalists Monday by defending abortion and sex education, and made a plea to curb the population boom "for earth's sake."

In her opening day speech, the outspoken rime minister of Norway, Gro Harlem Brundtland, framed a key issue of the U.N. population conference: giving power to women as the way to slow birth rates.

Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto of Pakistan, the only other woman head of state present, supported women's equality but took a far more conservative view on abortion and sexual issues.

Bhutto's decision to attend the nine-day conference and buck conservative Islamic opponents was in itself a victory for the organizers. Two other Muslim women leaders, Tansu Ciller of Turkey and Khalida Zia of Bangladesh, backed out.

But Bhutto's rejection of sections of the proposed 20-year blueprint to curb population growth, coupled with another Vatican attack on abortion, reflected the polarized debate at the conference.

Weeks before it opened the U.N. conference exploded in controversy over the issues of abortion, birth control and sex education.

The Vatican opposes artificial birth control and abortion in all cases, while Muslim fundamentalists say the draft plan of action promotes promiscuity, homosexuality and a loosening of family ties.

In three preliminary meetings, delegates to the conference agreed to more than 90 percent of the plan of action. But the most contentious issues must still be resolved — reproductive health and family planning services, reproductive rights, adolescent sex education and abortion.

Vice President Al Gore said Monday that participants were "very close" to a consensus on the subjects still in dispute. But he predicted the Vatican would not accept the final document despite compromise language being worked out by the European Union.

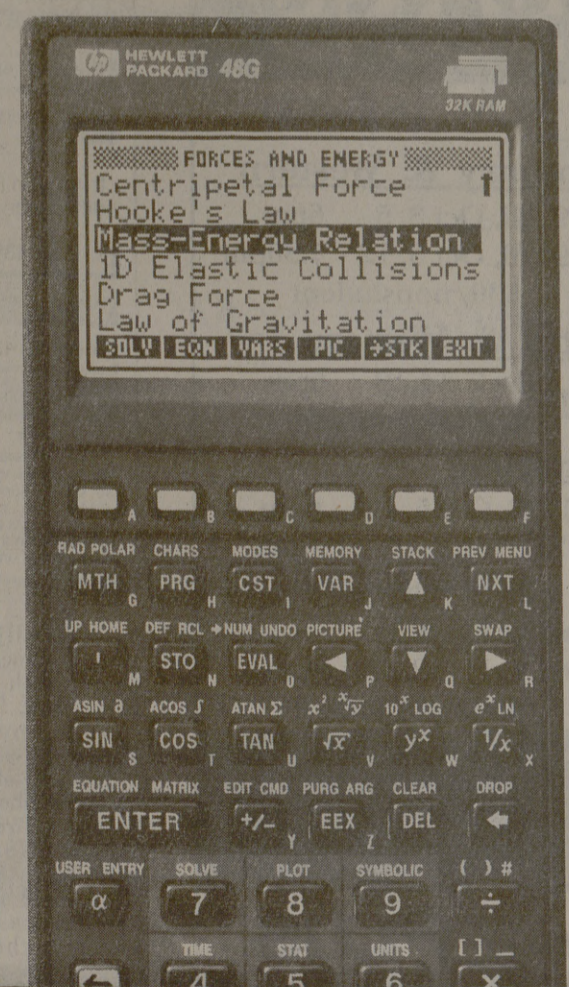
Papal spokesman Joaquin Navarro, a member of the Vatican delegation, reiterated the Roman Catholic Church's opposition to references in the draft to "reproductive health," calling the phrase implicit recognition of abortion accessible to all.

Brundtland, a physician turned politician, received sustained applause when she took on the Vatican's position.

"I have tried in vain to understand how that term can possibly be read as promoting abortions or qualifying abortion as a means of family planning," she said. "Rarely, if ever, have so many misrepresentations been used to imply meaning that was never there in the first place."

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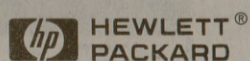
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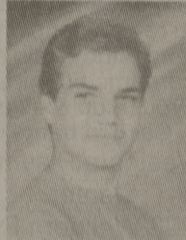
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