

SW 125B/Lewis: Please Read for Thursday January 27

First-grader shot dead by classmate in Michigan school

February 29, 2000

[MOUNT MORRIS TOWNSHIP, Michigan](#) -- A 6-year-old girl was shot in her classroom Tuesday by another first-grade student and died later at a hospital, officials said.

The shooting happened at Buell Elementary School in the suburb of Mount Morris Township just north of Flint, Michigan, in a classroom full of students.

School officials said the shooting involved a handgun, but they were not sure if it was fired deliberately or accidentally.

The girl was taken to the trauma unit at Hurley Medical Center in Flint, where she died at 10:29 a.m., hospital spokeswoman Stephanie Motschenbacher said.

The suspected shooter was a 6-year-old boy, who brought the gun to school, police said. Investigators were questioning the boy.

Genesee County Prosecutor Arthur A. Busch said officials had received reports of a scuffle between the victim and the suspected shooter the day before the shooting.

The weapon, a .32-caliber handgun, was reported stolen in December, Busch said, and it "somehow got in the boy's house."

Busch said that, as a matter of law, a 6-year-old cannot be held criminally liable for his actions, but the child's family circumstances and the details of how he came into possession of the gun were under investigation and could possibly lead to charges against other people.

"We believe at this time there was one shot fired," Mount Morris Township Police Chief Eric King told a news conference.

King said there were 22 children and a teacher in the classroom when the shooting happened. He said they were being questioned as witnesses and aided by grief counselors. Busch said that after the shooting a teacher took the gun away from the shooter.

Third-grader Corey Sutton, 9, said he heard a bang. "I thought it was a desk or something falling," he said. "The principal came over the PA system and told teachers to shut their doors and lock them. I was scared; my heart was pounding."

The teacher told pupils to line up and get their coats on, Corey said, and then "she told us what happened. A girl got shot, and the teacher started crying."

School evacuated

The school -- more than 400 students from kindergarten through grade four -- was immediately evacuated. The children were taken to the Greater Friendship Church across the street, where they later were picked up by their parents.

Crystal Watson, 8, who was in her third-grade class, said she didn't know anything had happened until she heard sirens.

"We were told to stay in our class and stay calm," she told The Flint Journal. "A couple of boys were crying, but everyone else was staying calm."

"We're interested in how the little boy came into possession of the weapon," Busch said. "We've had other schoolchildren take guns to elementary schools before ... but it never went this far with it. It's a sign of our times where we have a fully armed society that doesn't take its responsibility to secure its weapons seriously."

Mount Morris Township is some 65 miles northwest of Detroit.

The school is examining ways to increase security following the shooting and will remain closed, at least for the rest of the day.

"I want to know how a 6-year-old boy got a gun," one extremely upset mother told reporters.

President Clinton echoed the question while speaking at a Democratic fund-raiser in West Palm Beach, Florida. He renewed his call for tougher gun laws, including requiring child safety locks on guns.

"Today in Michigan in a school, a 6-year-old boy... shot a 6-year-old girl and she died," the president said.

"The child was 6 years old, how did that child get that gun? Why could the child fire the gun? If we have the technology today to put in these child safety locks, why don't we do it?"

The president said he didn't know the facts of the case and that he didn't want to "prejudge it or condemn anyone," but he added the accidental death rate for children in America is nine times higher than that of the other 25 biggest countries combined.

In April 1999, two Columbine High School students in Littleton, Colorado, went on a shooting rampage, killing 12 other students and a teacher before committing suicide in the worst school shooting in U.S. history.

One month after that, a student opened fire at Heritage High School near Conyers, Georgia, injuring six schoolmates before being taken into custody.