# West Potomac teacher hailed as hero after intervening in school stabbing incident



At West Potomac High School in Fairfax County, Virginia, an act of bravery by a special education teacher helped prevent a potentially greater tragedy during a stabbing incident on the morning of Wednesday, 14 June 2023.

Joe Petrucelli, who also serves as the head coach of the West Potomac girls' basketball team, stepped into a violent confrontation between three teenage boys that escalated rapidly in one of the school’s crowded corridors. The incident began around 9.40am when the students became involved in a physical altercation. Eyewitnesses captured the scene on their mobile phones, showing the panic that ensued as one of the boys drew a knife. The 15-year-old attacker stabbed a 16-year-old student, who collapsed and bled heavily in the hallway. The attacker then pursued the wounded boy through the corridor, creating a scene of chaos and fear among the students present.

Amid this dangerous situation, Coach Petrucelli intervened unarmed. With the assistance of Tracey Vasques, a veteran health and physical education teacher, he confronted the knife-wielding teenager, physically restraining him and helping to calm the situation. Vasques managed to convince the assailant to drop the knife, which she then secured by stepping on it until law enforcement arrived.

West Potomac girls’ basketball wrote in a statement recognising Coach Petrucelli as a hero: “West Potomac girls' basketball coach and special education teacher Joe Petrucelli became a hero, likely saving a life and preventing further harm – despite putting himself in danger… When a knife-wielding student chased another student whom he had already stabbed, Coach Joe intervened in the hallway, physically restraining the assailant.”

The Mount Vernon District Representative on the Fairfax County School Board, Mateo Dunne, also praised Petrucelli’s actions, stating to the Daily Mail, “For him to intervene in that way, it's beyond heroism.” Dunne added, however, “It's the kind of heroism that should never fall on the shoulders of our teachers,” calling instead for enhanced security measures within schools.

Fairfax County Police Chief Kevin Davis confirmed the stabbing was an isolated incident. The victim and the suspect were known to one another, and police also questioned a third student involved in the initial fight, though no charges were filed against him. The victim’s condition was later upgraded from critical to stable.

Following the attack, Superintendent Michelle Reid faced questions from angry parents demanding more transparency and immediate safety improvements. Many parents expressed frustration over the school’s initial decision to keep students inside and delay communication, with some taking their children out of school once the building reopened that afternoon.

The incident has intensified debate about school security in Fairfax County. Dunne called for an immediate review and overhaul of safety protocols at West Potomac, urging the hiring of additional armed school resource officers (SROs) to meet the national recommended ratio of one SRO per 1,000 students. West Potomac currently has around 3,000 students but reportedly only one SRO on site. Dunne also advocated employing unarmed security assistants dedicated to monitoring hallways and intervening when misconduct occurs, emphasising that these changes should not be hampered by budget or bureaucratic delays.

Superintendent Reid disclosed that Fairfax County Public Schools had recently begun piloting metal detectors at selected campuses, but West Potomac was not included in the current phase of the rollout. “We were putting metal detectors in another school that very morning,” she said. “But they weren't yet at West Potomac.”

In the wake of the stabbing, Reid encouraged the school community to utilise counseling services provided to support both students and staff following the traumatic event, stressing that simply sending students home immediately after such incidents may not be advisable.

Among local leaders, Virginia Senate Majority Leader Scott Surovell, himself a West Potomac parent, expressed his anguish, saying, “These students are so close to the end of the school year, and for many, a graduation. This time for celebration is now marred by this ugly incident. These kids deserved so much better today.”

The attack has left the school community grappling with the immediate trauma and broader concerns about student safety. The presence of blood in the school corridors, along with the distress witnessed by students, has had a significant impact on the sense of security at West Potomac High School. Meanwhile, the police investigation remains active as authorities continue to pursue details surrounding the event.

The Daily Mail is reporting on these developments as the community seeks to understand the implications of the attack and the measures required to better protect students and staff in the future.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

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6. <https://www.noahwire.com> - This link is mentioned in the query but does not lead to information about the specific event at West Potomac High School.
7. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14651469/Teachers-heroic-actions-revealed-horrific-West-Potomac-school-stabbing.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data