

Funerals Begin for Newtown Victims as Schools Confront Tragedy

Mourners in Newtown, Connecticut, headed for the first two of 20 funerals of schoolchildren massacred in their classroom as the rest of the nation on Monday anxiously sent children back to school with tightened security.

Tiny caskets marked the first wave of funerals for the 20 children and six adults killed in the shooting rampage at Sandy Hook Elementary School on Friday. Noah Pozner and Jack Pinto, both 6 years old, will be laid to rest on Monday afternoon.

President Barack Obama, who said in Newtown on Sunday that the 20-year-old gunman acted out of “unconscionable evil,” was heralded by the family of teacher Victoria Soto, 27, who was slain as she tried to protect her first-grade students.

“He really made us feel like she really was a hero and that everyone should know it,” her brother, Carlos Soto, said on CBS on Monday.

Obama, addressing an interfaith vigil in the small Connecticut town on Sunday night, spoke forcefully on the country’s failings in protecting its children and demanded changes in response to the mass shootings of the last few months.

“We can’t tolerate this anymore. These tragedies must end. And to end them, we must change,” he said, adding that he would bring together law enforcement, teachers, mental health professionals and others to study how to stop the violence.

But before those changes, the families of the victims will grieve.

Noah, 6 years old just last month, was the youngest victim. Reports describe him as “inquisitive” and as particularly mature for his age. The family’s rabbi has said he encouraged Noah’s mother to focus on her other four children amid the grief.

Jack, also 6, was a wrestler who loved sports. The New York Giants receiver Victor Cruz played Sunday’s football game with the boy’s name written all over his cleats and gloves.

All the dead children were 6 or 7 years old. The school principal of Sandy Hook Elementary, the school psychologist and four teachers were also gunned down.

At Sunday night’s memorial, Obama offered words of hope and promises of action to stop any further tragedies.

“We bear responsibility for every child ... This is our first task, caring for our children. It’s our first job. If we don’t get that right, we don’t get anything right,” he said.

The president kept his emotions in tighter check than he did on Friday, when he cried openly while addressing the shooting. But his tears were matched by the packed crowd in the high school auditorium, who wailed when he read the names of the adults and children who were killed.

Schools Ready to Open

While the two boys are laid to rest and the other families prepare their own memorials, schools across the country will attempt to return to business as usual, though there will be signs everywhere of how unusual the situation has become.

Some schools will put on extra security guards. Others will begin their day with a moment of silence. On Twitter, young people nationwide have urged their classmates to wear green and white, the colors of Sandy Hook Elementary School.

“I’m struggling with if I should bring it up at all. And if I

do, what am I going to say about it? I'm just praying about it, because I don't know," said Molli Falgout, a first-grade teacher in Kernersville, North Carolina.

In Newtown, schools will not reopen on Monday. The district has said teachers need time to prepare for the students' return.

Instead, the town's youth sports groups have set up a field day of sorts to keep children occupied with athletics, board games and arts and crafts. Schools superintendent Janet Robinson described it as an effort "to help provide some small level of comfort and support to the children in our community."

The community will also have to make a decision about what to do with the bullet-ridden Sandy Hook Elementary, whose students will for now attend classes in an empty school in a neighboring town.

"I think we have to go back into that building at some point. That's how you heal. It doesn't have to be immediately but I sure wouldn't want to give up on it," said local resident Tim Northrop.

A more detailed picture of 20-year-old Adam Lanza's stunning attack emerged on Sunday.

After killing his mother, Nancy Lanza, at home, Adam Lanza shot his way into the school. He had attended Sandy Hook as a child, according to former classmates.

Police said Lanza was armed with hundreds of bullets in high-capacity magazines of about 30 rounds each for the Bushmaster AR 15 rifle and two handguns he carried into the school, and had a fourth weapon, a shotgun, in his car outside. He killed himself in the school.

Investigators are examining forensic evidence and scouring the

crime scene in a process likely to extend for weeks.

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