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Security stepped up at Wachusett Regional

By Jean Laquidara Hill TELEGRAM & GAZETTE STAFF

Threats of retaliation have Wachusett Regional High School in Holden on alert this morning, with police stepping up their presence in and around the school.

The school and town are dealing with the fallout of a school beating that was captured on video and widely viewed on the Internet.

Meantime, a 17-year-old Worcester youth charged in a fight near the school Monday was arraigned in Leominster District Court this morning.

Brendan W. Simpson, 17, of Katahdin St., Worcester, pleaded not guilty to charges of assault and battery with a dangerous weapon, a metal pipe; assault and battery, and conspiracy for his role in planning the beating. He had been freed on \$500 cash bail after his arrest yesterday, but was held on \$2500 cash bail today.

Mr. Simpson is one of three teens arrested for their alleged involvement in a brawl that left two youths injured. The confrontation was captured on video, from a student's cell phone.

This morning, Holden Police Chief George R. Sherrill said threats of retaliation with guns have been circulating through text messaging. Police protection at and near the school will continue through the week, the chief said.

When bail was set this morning, a court officer handcuffed Mr. Simpson as his mother wept silently in a back row of the courtroom.

Mr. Simpson is one of three males arrested in the aftermath of a fight the chief described as vicious. The identities of the other two suspects who were arrested is not being disclosed because they are juveniles. One is a 15 year old Holden male and the other a 16-year-old Worcester male, both students at Wachusett Regional High School.

Authorities said Mr. Simpson is not a student at any school.

The fight broke out after school Monday on a side street near the regional high school. The argument was between two Wachusett Regional students, but one of the students called in acquaintances from Worcester as reinforcements, according to police and students.

In court today, Assistant District Attorney Erin Donnelly argued for \$5000 cash bail, telling the court that although Mr. Simpson has no adult criminal record, he has a record of offenses as a juvenile.

Ms. Donnelly described Mr. Simpson's alleged role in the fight as "disturbing," saying the primary victim was picked up and thrown onto the ground.



Brendan M. Simpson, 17, of Worcester during his arraignment this morning in Leominster District Court. (Rick Cinclair)

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She said Mr. Simpson had no connection to the victim, but was called to the scene by a friend for the sole purpose of beating the student, which he did with a metal pipe. Ms. Donnelly also told the court a second Wachusett Regional student was injured when he tried to help his friend get up off the ground. Both injured students had been treated at a hospital after the fight, she said. The primary target returned to the hospital yesterday.

Chief Sherrill said a warrant has been issued for a juvenile living in Worcester. The youth is not a student at Wachusett Regional.

Chief Sherrill said he believes the four suspects were the core of the trouble. He said a motive has not yet been determined.

Two Wachusett Regional students were injured in the fight; the second student was whacked with a metal pipe when he tried to help his friend get up off the ground, the prosecutor said.



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