

Principal, gunman were friends; motive in killing unknown

By Peter Hecht, Kim Minugh, Gina Kim and Carlos Alcalá, Sacramento Bee

Only last Sunday, the two golfing buddies spent the day together on the course. But on Wednesday, a janitor at a Placerville elementary school confronted his friend, the principal, with a gun, police said.

In a flash of fire, Principal Sam LaCara of Louisiana Schnell School lay mortally wounded. Within an hour, the married father of three daughters, a respected school administrator known for his sense of humor and love of sports, died at Marshall Medical Center in Placerville.

“It’s a tragedy for Placerville and our entire society,” Police Chief George Nielsen declared at an afternoon news conference, in which he announced that a suspect – the janitor – had been arrested and that all the school’s children were safe.

LaCara was gunned down shortly after 10:30 a.m. in his office on the wooded campus for kindergartners to fifth-graders near nature trails and the scenic drive to Apple Hill.

Worried parents rushed to pick up, hug and reassure their children after authorities had them evacuated in El Dorado Transit buses to the El Dorado County Fairgrounds.

“All the children are safe,” said a recording at the offices of the Placerville Union School District.

Nielsen said at least one student may have witnessed the shooting as LaCara, 50, was struck down by a gunshot to his

upper chest.

The alleged gunman, identified by police as janitor John Luebbers, 44, was arrested by sheriff's deputies without incident at his home in the town of El Dorado.

Read the whole story