

IN BRIEF

High court refuses Scott Peterson's jury request

REDWOOD CITY, Calif. — The California Supreme Court on Monday rejected a request from Scott Peterson's lawyers that a new jury be selected to decide whether he should get the death penalty.

The ruling clears the way for the penalty phase to start on Tuesday.

The same six-man, six-woman jury that convicted Peterson on Nov. 12 of murdering his pregnant wife, Laci, and the fetus she carried will decide whether he should get life in prison or death.

Defense attorney Mark Geragos had argued that the jurors were tainted by the public's reaction to the verdict. When the verdict was announced, a big cheer went up from a crowd outside the courthouse and spectators pumped their fists approvingly.

Geragos wanted the case moved, perhaps to Los Angeles County, and a new jury selected for the penalty phase, a request that was previously turned down by the trial judge and an appeals court.

Dollar worries keep Wall Street on edge

NEW YORK — Stocks finished mixed in a volatile session Monday as investors worried that the

continued fall of the U.S. dollar would spur inflation and hurt the overall economy. The concerns overshadowed a decent start to the holiday shopping season.

With the Federal Reserve meeting Dec. 14, many investors felt that the weakening dollar, which failed to gain much ground against other currencies Monday, would lead to substantially higher interest rates as the threat of inflation grows.

Wall Street also bid retail stocks lower despite improved sales for most retailers over the Thanksgiving weekend. A warning from Wal-Mart Stores Inc., which said its sales were lower than expected, led to selling across the sector. A strong showing in sales of

electronics kept tech stocks slightly higher for the session.

The Dow Jones industrial average fell 46.33, or 0.44 percent, to 10,475.90. The Dow had been down more than 105 points earlier in the session.

Psychoanalysis request denied in Jackson case

SANTA MARIA, Calif. — The judge in the child-molestation case against Michael Jackson refused on Monday to order Jackson's accuser and the boy's family to undergo psychological examinations.

Superior Court Judge Rodney Melville ruled without hearing arguments in court and gave no reason for rejecting the request

from Jackson's side.

Attorneys could not comment on the decision because of a gag order.

The judge did grant a defense request to release transcripts of the grand jury selection process as long as grand jurors' names remained confidential. The defense has complained that prosecutors had too much sway over grand jurors.

The pop star is accused of molesting a boy and plying him with alcohol. His trial is set to begin Jan. 31.

Attorneys also argued in court over efforts by the defense to subpoena medical and banking records involving the accuser's family. Prosecutors said the material is irrelevant.

— The Associated Press



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School violence cut in half in last 10 years, report says

Justice and Education departments report that students are safer in school buildings than they are on the streets

BY CURT ANDERSON
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Violent crime against students in schools fell by 50 percent between 1992 and 2002, with young people more often targeted for violence away from school.

There were about 24 cases of rape, sexual assault, robbery and physical assault for every 1,000 students in 2002, down from 48 per 1,000 a decade earlier, according to a report Monday from the Education and Justice departments.

The reduction mirrored the trend found outside classrooms — overall crime is at a 30-year low across the nation.

The report found instances of school violence involving students have dropped steadily since a string of fatal shootings in the 1990s, notably the 1999 killings of 13 people at Columbine High School in Colorado by two heavily armed students.

"There has been a drop, and we attribute a lot of that to the fact that schools are focusing on the issue more," said William Lassiter, school safety specialist at the Center for the Prevention of School Violence in Raleigh, N.C.

Schools have taken a number of steps to reduce violence, from installing metal detectors and hiring more security personnel to implementing programs aimed at curbing bullying, which can lead to more serious crimes. A recent analysis of more than 200 studies shows that school-based violence prevention programs reduce school violence by up to 50 percent, said Dewey Cornell, director of the Virginia Youth Violence Project

at the University of Virginia.

"Prevention programs have been quietly successful but tend to get overlooked. If you have one fight at school, it gets a lot of attention," Cornell said.

OTHER FINDINGS IN THE REPORT

In 2003, 22 percent of students in grades 9-12 reported using marijuana during the preceding 30 days. That compares with 18 percent in 1993 and 27 percent in 1999.

About 45 percent of high school students in 2003 said they had at least one alcoholic drink in the 30 days before they were surveyed, about the same as in 1993 and down from a recent high of 52 percent in 1995.

A third of students in grades 9-12 said that someone had offered, given or sold them an illegal drug on school property in 2003. That number has essentially remained the same over the past decade.

About 21 percent of students in 2003 said that street gangs were active in their schools, most often in urban districts.

— The Associated Press

Others say the scope of the problem is underreported by the federal study, which relies on limited surveys and self-reporting instead of tracking actual reported crimes. In addition, the data used is already outdated, said Kenneth Trump, president of National School Safety and Security Services, a consulting firm.

"To tell the American public that school crime is dramatically declining based upon underreported, outdated and limited data is misleading and creates a false sense of security," Trump said.

The report found students are more apt to be victims of violence outside schools.

In 2002, there were about 659,000 violent crimes involving students at

school and about 720,000 away from school property. For the most serious nonfatal violent crimes — rape, assault and robbery — the crime rates were lower in school than away from school every year from 1992 to 2002.

The report also found that, between 1992 and 2000, students between 5 and 19 were 70 times more likely to be murdered away from school than on campus. There were 234 homicides at school during that time span, compared with more than 24,000 away from school.

"There was initially great concern about school violence, but our report shows that kids are safer at school than they are away from school," said the report's co-author, Katrina Baum of the Bureau of Justice Statistics.

Overall in 1992 there were more than 3.4 million crimes in school against students between 12 and 18, the report estimated. That included more than 2.2 million thefts — by far the most common serious crime in school — and over 1.1 million violent crimes.

By 2002, the report found the total number had dropped to 1.7 million crimes: just over 1 million thefts and about 659,000 violent crimes.

Teachers are also targets of school-house crime. The report found that from 1998 through 2002 teachers were victims of an annual average of 233,900 crimes at school, more than 90,000 of them violent. That translates to an annual rate of 51 crimes per 1,000 teachers.

The report shows that inner-city teachers are more than twice as likely to be victims of violent crimes than those in suburban or rural school districts, and that male teachers are more often attacked than female teachers. The report does not give year-to-year comparisons because the sample sizes studied are too small, Baum said.

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