

Shippensburg Education Community

In discussions we've had with parents and staff, questions arise about school security in light of incidents that occurred two weeks ago. The purpose of this letter is to briefly review these incidents and summarize school district approaches to security.

Last week, two incidents involving bb guns occurred. In one instance, a student attending the alternative high school, upon leaving a meeting in the high school office, brandished the pistol in front of the school. In a second, a Shippensburg adult showed a pistol, while in his car, to students walking away from the school to their cars near Memorial Park.

In both instances, calls were made to law enforcement that resulted in the apprehension of suspects and each is now in the judicial system.

At the high school with the first instance, the administrator announced a lockdown and within minutes lifted the lockdown since the student with the weapon was driven away. A communication was sent to high school parents via Connect-Ed and posted on the website notifying them of the lockdown. Later, after information was gathered, students, staff and parents were given an explanation of what occurred.

Since the second incident occurred after school, students who observed the car in which the pistol was brandished contacted the school and law enforcement was informed. Using our voice Connect-Ed system, high school and middle school parents and staff were notified that evening, and informed that law enforcement would have a presence the next day.

In reviewing these incidents, we have heard and discussed several concerns. First, was the communication surrounding the incident. We used our voice and email messaging system, Connect-Ed, to inform parents and staff. We also used the district website for posting information. In the first instance, clearly information could have been provided sooner and across the district.

When an incident occurs, we will use our website to post information, and voice and email for direct communication.

In an ongoing effort to ensure safe school practices this past school year, the district asked David Lindenmuth, who has extensive background and training in emergency management, to serve as Chief of School Security and to assist the Superintendent who is designated as the School Security Coordinator.

As we discuss security, people have also been asking about steps we take to keep students safe. The school district and schools regularly conduct trainings for staff and students. Last September, school representatives attended a training on Active Shooter Response. Under the guidance of Mr. Lindenmuth, then each school representative who attended the September training, presented information to each school during the February 18 in-service on Active Shooter, Lockdowns, Run-Hide-Fight and situational awareness. Schools will then be providing students with information and age appropriate activities such as were suggested in the workshop.

Additionally, the district has consulted with Carlisle-based MG Tactical to offer consultation and programs for staff and high school students. In October 2017, the district conducted a full-scale drill using protocol and training conducted by MG Tactical. This drill combined efforts of local law enforcement with emergency management teams in coordination with district staff. An after action review followed.

Other training in which our administrative staff have participated has provided the basis for conducting initial threat assessments, utilizing a protocol established for school officials as guidance when evaluating threats, and determining when to involve outside assistance like law enforcement.

School security depends on our students informing adults when they are concerned about safety related to weapons and life-threatening threats, such as suicide/ideation, bullying and harassment. Since mid-January, we have had Safe2Say, an anonymous tip hotline/software program, allowing anyone to provide information about perceived threats at their school. This hotline supplements students talking to an adult at school when they are concerned.

Our schools' safety depends upon close communication with local law enforcement. In both instances last week, we received tremendous support from the Shippensburg Police Department. The Pennsylvania State Police also respond to our safety concerns with outstanding supports.

We regularly receive support from Shippensburg Police Department as we respond to safety concerns in violation of school policies. When Chief Dominick became the new chief, we met to discuss the new Safe2Say Program. She also walked each of the schools with the building principal and me.

This spring, the district is implementing a visitor identification system that requires visitors entering the building during school operating hours to present an ID that will be scanned in order to enter the building. This will provide an additional layer of security, as all entrances to buildings are locked during the school day.

The school district has requested that the state police conduct a safety assessment in the district. This will permit a thorough review of our facilities so we can learn of any concerns found. We have applied for grants from different sources to replace cameras at the high school. We are asking the Board to consider security camera upgrades at the high school and middle school and installing camera systems at the elementary schools.

Security at our schools depends on all of us working together so we can be aware of threats, diligently prepare for the potential threats, and learn from any situations that can benefit us. This past week, in reviewing each situation, broader communication about what had occurred would have helped people to better understand what occurred. When incidents occur such as at the high school, we review each, and work to address issues or conditions that arise.

Educationally yours,

Jerry Wilson, PhD
Superintendent