

Every child, every day, without exception!

February 20, 2018

Dear Parents:

Last week, we all watched in horror after another tragic loss of lives in the school shooting in Parkland, Florida. I know we are all grieving with the families who lost loved ones and with the community that has been shaken due to this unthinkable act of violence. I am sure this situation has raised questions about how Catoosa County Public Schools is working to maintain safe schools for students, faculties, and visitors.

In 2014, we used the Stakeholder Driven Strategic Planning in Education Model to update our five year strategic plan. We surveyed the community to determine priorities. Based on these surveys, school safety and security was identified as a community priority on three of the four survey questions. When we developed our strategic plan, we included a school safety objective. We also included major safety enhancement projects in our ESPLOST V referendum, and we appreciate that the community overwhelmingly passed ESPLOST V to improve safety and security in our schools.

Safety projects and protocols include the following:

- School Resources Officers (SROs): In partnership with Catoosa County Sheriff, Gary Sisk, we have armed and trained SROs in every middle and high school.
- Georgia Emergency Management Agency (GEMA) Approved Safety Plan: CCPS has a GEMA approved safety plan, developed in partnership with Sherriff Sisk's office. School safety teams closely monitor implementation of our safety plan, and we have regular drills to practice our protocols so we are prepared in the event of an emergency. Our plan is also used by GEMA as a model for other school systems in Georgia.
- Multi-agency teams and school safety teams: CCPS partners with law enforcement and emergency management to develop district-wide safety plans and protocols. This team meets regularly and conducts safety audits in every school. School safety teams are responsible for implementing protocols and conducting safety drills. "Run, Hide, Survive" drills are conducted with teachers and students to practice appropriate responses based on different emergency scenarios.
- Threat Assessment Protocol: The Sheriff's Department works with schools to conduct threat assessments to evaluate potential risks.

ESPLOST V Projects:

- Front-door access systems: Buzz-in systems have been installed in every elementary and middle school. Installations are in progress at our high schools. With this system, visitor identification is verified prior to an individual being allowed in the school. Unknown visitors are not allowed in the building until their purpose has been validated by an administrator.
- Surveillance equipment including new security cameras have been installed in every school.

- SIELOX Class (Crisis Lockdown Alert Status System): This system was piloted at Tiger Creek Elementary School in 2016-17, and Sielox is now installed in all of our schools and training is underway.

CLASS is an emergency notification and response solution that can instantly initiate an alert condition, enable communications with first responders, and visually track and report status in real time on a room-by-room basis. During emergency situations, CLASS greatly improves response accuracy and effectiveness, saving time and helping responders prioritize their actions. Teachers, administrators, or any designated initiator, can issue an emergency alert to notify responders of a crisis. The Sielox system silently dispatches 911, and all responders have access to a color-coded map of the school from their smartphone, tablet, or computer. CCPS also utilizes motion detectors with this system; therefore, if someone is in a hallway, it shows red on the map, so law enforcement officers could quickly pinpoint an intruder's location in a crisis.

- The school system has a patented lock, so no one else has access to our unique key. We began rekeying our doors with ESPLOST IV, and we will continue this project with ESPLOST V.

Additional Considerations:

- Sometimes in a crisis situation, the best option is to barricade the classroom and stay inside. We are researching individual door locking systems for our classrooms.
- I believe School Resource Officers, who are armed and trained for emergency situations, is one of the best measures to ensure safe schools. While we have SROs in all secondary schools, a goal in our strategic plan is to identify funding to provide SROs in elementary schools.

I want you to be confident that student safety and school security are our highest priorities. While I believe we have exceptional safety measures and security protocols, I want this community to be confident that we are continually working with law enforcement officers and reviewing best school safety practices to evaluate our procedures to continue to enhance our efforts.

In addition to our security measures, it is critical that we receive communication from parents and students when unsafe behavior is observed. In the last week, two high school students have been arrested for threatening comments on social media. These comments occurred outside of the school day, and were deemed by the Sheriff as uncreditable threats; however, we appreciate that these posts were reported to school officials so we could deal with them appropriately. In addition to requesting that suspicious behavior and social media posts be reported, I would encourage you to discuss appropriate behavior with your children. In today's climate, any threat to student or adult safety at school will be reported to law enforcement and students may experience very serious consequences.

The board of education and I understand this community's expectation for safe schools. We appreciate that the community continues to pass ESPLOST to provide the funds for us to improve security. We appreciate the relationship we have with Sheriff Sisk and our city police departments to have law enforcement presence and support to maintain safe schools. If you have any school-specific safety concerns or security questions, please contact your school's principal. You may also email any security questions to me at questions@catoosa.k12.ga.us.

Kind regards,

Denia Reese, Superintendent CCPS