

I had originally reserved this column for commentary on what I hoped would be a fully funded pay raise so desperately needed for our teachers. After last Monday, it appears the political gridlock that has become our state government will continue. It appears such gridlock has become business as usual in our state. I had elements of what this column would eventually become, sitting in a draft folder to share with our community. The events in Florida last week prompted me to pull those thoughts out of the draft folder and share them with you.

I've heard from several parents who were curious what changes we might consider based on the events of the school shooting in Florida as well as threats here and in many parts of our state. My first year as your superintendent was also the year of the Newtown, Connecticut school shooting. Even before that event, we established that examining our safety and security measures would be ongoing. We have made several modifications to those protocols this year in an effort to standardize what is considered best for our students and community.

In the six years since my arrival, significant changes have occurred to improve the security of our students and staff. All buildings have integrated security systems which require someone from a security checkpoint to open the door unless a valid school identification badge is present at the card reader. These door locks have cameras so the person who is at the security checkpoint can see who is outside and communicate with them.

Adding two additional School Resource Officers, bringing our total to three inside the district has proven to be the most expensive investment but also the most beneficial. Each of these members of the Guthrie Police Department receive specialized training and are assigned to two school sites. Their role is much more than security. They provide age appropriate education to students and professional development to staff members. They also develop positive relationships with students which has allowed many potentially dangerous events to be stopped before they occur.

We have in place a protocol for security and communication with the community and parents. A change the security level of a school generally comes at the request of the Guthrie Police Department. Having SRO's on our campuses allows for seamless communication. In many cases a security level change is a precaution prompted by an event occurring near a school. An example would be a domestic argument at a house near a school. If the change in security levels is more than momentary, we will notify parents through an automated system that places calls, sends text messages and emails. The phone numbers called will be those provided to the school at enrollment. In the event your phone number changes, it is essential that you communicate the new number to the main office at all of your children's schools. This message will not be sent until the situation has stabilized where we can account for all students and their safety. We do not normally place those calls unless security level changes. Most crisis experts agree that placing automated calls too frequently lessens the effect of urgency on the recipients.

Events such as a school shooting can make all of us very concerned for the safety of our children. There were numerous social media posts asking why each parent didn't receive a call about a threat at our Junior High recently. A press release went out only after the final determination of the legal consequences of the student was known. Had any students been in danger or a security level in the building had changed, parents would have been promptly notified. Stopping a school threat requires students notifying adults at school if they hear or see something that could possibly constitute a threat. I would urge all parents to speak to

their children, regardless of age, about the importance of speaking to an adult if they see or hear something that concerns them.

This fall we put in place some new terminology for changes in security level. The term “lockout” is the first level beyond normal protocols. In this scenario, students outside a school building are brought inside and accounted for. All buildings are locked and will not allow entrance of anyone besides first responders. This was generally referred to previously as “shelter in place.” In most cases with this security level, teaching in the classroom will continue but student traffic in the hallway is kept to a minimum.

The next level of security is called a “lockdown.” In this scenario, students are trained to move away from sight and maintain silence. Teachers are trained to lock their classroom door and turn their lights out. They do not open their doors and keep students calm.

In the event that it is necessary to evacuate students, they will be instructed to leave their belongings except their phones behind, forming a single line as they will be lead to the evacuation location. Such locations will vary based on the threat, current weather and number of students to evacuate. It will generally be another location in the building or another school facility nearby.

You may have noticed this fall that numbers have been placed over doors on all of our school buildings. This is part of integrating a mapping system for all first responders so we can instruct them which door they should enter to reach the location in most urgent need. All first responders have access to an electronic key to enter our buildings. When this mapping project is completed, each classroom will have a map with the outside door numbers so a teacher could tell the dispatcher where to go to reach their classroom. All first responders will also have access to the maps.

Guthrie Public Schools enjoys a very beneficial relationship with the first responders in our community. I consider the collaborative leadership of the Guthrie Fire Department, Guthrie Police Department, Logan County Sheriff’s Office and the Logan County Emergency Operations to be one of our district’s greatest assets. The commitment they show to constantly improving these protocols as well as continued cooperation should be noted to all parents. Keeping your kids safe is a team effort every day.