

School safety is a hot topic right now in our state and across the country, and I know it's something that our students, parents, employees and other stakeholders think about constantly.

While no community is immune to terrible violence, I do want everyone to know that we have:

- Excellent partnerships with local law enforcement agencies.
- Well-trained Bay County Sheriff's Office Deputies and BDS School Safety Officers at all schools.
- Hardened school front offices and campus perimeters.
- Research-based best practices for lockdown/evacuation/safety drills and procedures.
- More than 1400 security cameras around our schools, with 700 more coming next year.
- Highly-qualified armed guardians on campuses throughout the district.

And with that in mind, I'd like to take a minute to tell you about a couple of recent incidents that illustrate our daily challenges. You may not hear about all of these but rest assured; we're addressing safety situations every minute of every day.

About a month ago, an inebriated adult male showed up at one of our elementary schools to drop off a student. The man also had two young children in the car and could not walk or stand normally. Our School Safety Officer attempted to detain the driver to prevent him from leaving campus intoxicated, but the man refused to follow directions. The officer, who feared for the safety of the children in the car and other drivers on the road, reached into the vehicle to pepper spray the driver and grab the wheel. Still, the driver put the car in drive, and took off, dragging our officer under the fence.

By the time this happened, officers from the Panama City Police Department were on the scene, and they followed the driver for a couple of blocks before he crashed into some parked vehicles. The driver fled on foot but was apprehended quickly by the PCPD. The children were uninjured.

Our School Safety Officer, received ten stitches and multiple scrapes on his body, but he survived the incident. It was later determined that the individual was on probation from prison and had been in prison several times. The officer possibly saved other lives that day due to his bravery in stopping an individual who could have hurt or killed someone on the road due to his condition.

He is just one of our true Hometown Heroes.

On a different campus just last week, a school resource deputy was notified by school staff members that a student had attempted to inflict self-harm by stabbing himself in the neck and chest during class.

Fortunately, staff members and the deputy were able to intervene in time to save this student's life and prevent further harm. The student was later taken for a mental health evaluation, and services are being provided now. The staff member received some minor injuries but is recovering fully, and students involved in the situation are being provided counseling and support as needed.

It's a dangerous world out there and, unfortunately, schools are not immune to the pressures and challenges our entire society faces. Working together, however, we can do our best to keep our students as safe as possible, and that's where you, our community members, can help.

Please take the time to do the following as often as possible:

- See something, say something. If you see or hear something suspicious, report it. If it's after hours, call 911.
- Check the backpacks and cars of students in your lives. Unfortunately, students are bringing all sorts of "dangerous objects" to school, and those objects place the lives of others in danger.
- Talk with the children you know about the importance of keeping inappropriate items off campus and reporting rumors they hear to authorities.
- Ensure that any weapons or other dangerous objects at your home are secured and locked up so that children cannot access them.
- Follow the police department's 9 p.m. suggestion and make sure your cars and homes are securely locked before going to bed.

Thank you for all you do to support us and our focus on safety.

Stay safe, and God Bless!