

New developments enhance security, safety of school

By Karina Patel

news editor

Among the changes that come with a new school year, students and teachers have to adjust to the new security protocols. While some of the recent security modifications are noticeable and require more adapting to than others, all have been enlisted in order to better the safety of each student and faculty member. Starting this year, all students in OSD have been issued identification cards and are required to have them somewhere visible on their backpacks.

"It identifies that you're a student here. You're one of us. You're one of our community. We want people to notice that when someone doesn't have an ID, then they should have a yellow sticker, that they've gone through and signed in. We just have to be aware of the people here. It's an awareness of 'yes, they're a student here; they belong here.' It's very visible that they have an ID on," Superintendent Brian Harvey said. "It has some functional uses: it allows for us to know when they [the students] get on the bus, when they get off the bus. It's their lunch card. We're looking at how we can make those usable for other functions as well."

One of the physical security measures that has affected many students and faculty on the campus of OHS is the installment of fences on both sides of the courtyard as well as on the gym side.

"The idea behind that is that we have a close campus within the building, so that now, there is a fence, and we can allow the doors between the buildings. They can be open, and kids can move freely so that we do have an enclosed campus," Harvey said.

Having an enclosed campus between those gates allows for teachers and administrators to better be able to watch over the students when they are in large crowds, such as in the morning before the first bell or during lunch.

"We're trying to keep our students all in a general area as much as we can; that's why we have kind of changed how lunch works," Principal Noah Hamilton said. "It just makes sure that we know where all of our students are, whose with them, so if anything comes up, we're not missing anybody—we're not losing anybody."

While OHS has always had cameras in place monitoring the school, there is now a designated person sitting in the front office throughout the school day with the task of watching each camera and looking for anything unusual.

"It's just another step in the security system. Instead of having a monitor that nobody ever looks at or doesn't look at until we have a situation that comes up, now we have somebody that can see it all in real time and if anything comes across the screen that just doesn't quite look right, we can get on it before it gets too late," Hamilton said.

With the cameras constantly being monitored, administrators and School Resource Officers (SROs) can be alerted of any abnormalities and investigate the situation before it escalates to something potentially dangerous.

"We've already had instances where there have been things that they have noticed, and we've been able to dispatch SROs and other personnel, administrators, to make sure something doesn't happen that doesn't need to happen," Harvey said.

Administrators and SROs have also placed an emphasis on not opening outside doors or propping doors open for people locked outside in order to strengthen the safety of OHS.

"The best way to keep this school safe is that no one can get in from the outside that isn't supposed to be here. We've had, in the past, a lot of problems with students letting their friends in," SRO Donovan Lyons said. "It is imperative that the students help us by keeping all these doors shut: don't prop them open, don't put rocks in them, don't put objects in them to keep them open. We've stressed

the same thing to teachers and administrators too because that is the first and foremost thing you can do to stop any kind of attack on the school of any type." Earlier this month, a threat was made via social media targeting OSD schools. The information was quickly given to Lyons as well as other members of the Oxford Police Department. Since the threat was discovered after school hours, the culprits were apprehended before school the next day, ensuring the safety of all students and faculty.

Brian Harvey
Superintendent

"When we get a threat, whether it be via social media or phone calls or however we receive it, we treat every threat the same. We treat it as if it is real until we determine it is not. We'll forward that information onto our detectives and once the detectives get that information, they have technology they're able to trace where the threat came from," Lyons said. "Most threats are going to come from a phone or something that has an IP address, and we have the technology that can track that."

According to Lyons, as of July 1 of this year, it is now a felony offense to make a threat of any kind, whether that be verbal or through social media, against any school in Mississippi.

"It is imperative that if any student thinks it is a joke or that they're going to get out of going to school that day or they're gonna get out of taking a test that day and they'll just make a threat, it's not a joke. They will be charged," Lyons said.

The state of Mississippi has also mandated that all school faculty participate in CRASE (Civilian Response to Active Shooter Event) training in order to better prepare them in case an active shooter situation occurs.

"It is a run, hide, fight scenario. If you hear gun shots or you hear an attack going on, the first thing you should do as a civilian or you're not locked down is you run. The next thing you do, if you can, is you try to find a good hiding place, and the last resort that you have is to fight," Lyons said. "If there is an active attack, whether that be with a shooting or a knife or a car, you guys [the school] will all be on a lockdown. But, there might be an instance where somebody doesn't make it into a classroom in a lockdown, and they're locked out. So, what do they do? That was the reason for the training to give people options on what they can do if they

are not in a safe place at the time of a lockdown. If they get caught in the hallway, what can they do: run, hide, or fight."

Students are also encouraged to watch and be careful with their presence online of any kind in order to avoid any conflict that might start on social media and end on school property.

"We have more problems. Probably 90 percent of our problems at the high school are created from social media; I'm talking about Instagram, Snapchat, Facebook. Things that start outside in the community somehow make their way into the school the next day or a week later, and it always seems to be generated from something said on social media," Lyons said. "What happens on social media always end up in school, and we always end up having to deal with it, and once we have to deal with it here inside the school, it takes it to another level. You can be charged with disturbance of the school setting, charged with fighting, which would be a simple assault."

While it may take students time to get accustomed to these security changes and stay aware of their surroundings, all these measures are meant to help the students and faculty and prevent major disturbances or dangerous events.

"We don't want this to be a prison. We want everyone here to learn, but at the same time, there are rules, just like in life there are rules. We have rules here at the school that are put in place for their safety. We're not doing it to be oppressive. We're not doing it to keep them all balled up in the school and not let them have freedom of movement or to say what they want to say," Lyons said. "They need to be wary and cognizant of what they are saying and what they're doing because it will affect them for the rest of their lives."



School Resource Officer T.A. Bowen watches over the cameras around the school in order to catch any possible problems and preventing them before they occur. The observation of all school cameras is one of many new security modifications that have helped to monitor the school hallways and better the safety of it.

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