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The Charger is distributed free of charge to all students and is available for subscription for \$30. 1000 copies of each issue are printed.

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OXFORD SCHOOL SHOOTING RESULT OF ADMINISTRATIVE NEGLIGENCE

By Hayden Walker

editor-in-chief

On November 30, Oxford High School's office received multiple concerned phone calls about a school shooting. The Oxford School District sent out a message clarifying that the emergency was not happening here in Mississippi, but rather at an Oxford High School in Michigan.

In addition to the name, our two schools are eerily similar. We share school colors, have similar student populations, and both attend class in relatively modern buildings. School shootings are always a tragedy, but our uncanny resemblance to the OHS in Michigan should make this one hit extremely close to home. Although COVID-19 has propelled us into a "new normal," the fact that students are still dying in places of education reminds us that unfortunately, not much has changed. The reality is that the only reason the number of school shootings were down last year was because students were physically unable to be inside their school buildings due to lockdown restrictions.

As more information about the Oxford shooting becomes available, a disturbing picture is coming into focus: it was apathy on the part of the administration that caused the shooter to have the opportunity to kill his peers. The warning signs were abundant and obvious to students and teachers. The administration just didn't do enough.

After the Parkland shooting on Valentine's Day of 2018, our Oxford High School upgraded its security measures. Gates were erected, security cameras were installed and all doors were locked from the outside.

However, our security measures could not have stopped what happened in Michigan. The suspect, a 15-year-old sophomore, used a handgun that could easily fit inside his backpack. The reality is that any number of physical security measures will never be able to guarantee 100 percent safety to students. People with malicious intent will find their way around them. What else can we do to prevent tragedies like this from occurring again?

The answer lies in an often overlooked aspect of the people who

commit these crimes: their mental health. The Oxford Community School District (OCSD) in Michigan ignored all obvious signs that the shooter was mentally unstable. If more attention was paid to his increasingly alarming actions, OCSD could have prevented this tragedy from occurring.

Before the shooting happened, the shooter was reported twice for "concerning behavior." The first time this happened was the day before the shooting. A teacher saw the student searching for ammunition on his phone and sent him to see a guidance counselor. The next day, a different teacher found a drawing on his desk of a gun, a bleeding person, a bullet and the words "The thoughts won't stop. Help me." This time, the school called the student's parents to the school and warned that they would contact Child Protective Services if the parents did not seek counseling for their son within 48 hours.

But they didn't search his backpack or his locker.

The administration's alarm bells should have been going off. Clearly, this student was mentally unstable, was thinking about using guns in a violent manner, and was crying for help. Instead of school officials taking immediate action, the shooter was allowed to return to class as if there was no issue.

Schools across America have learned to practice responses to active shooters. But it took the death of a few hundred kids

for that to happen. Now, schools must shift their focus to responding to potential shooters. How many more kids will have to die for that to become implemented?

In order to prevent potential shootings, there are many things that school districts across the country can do. They can hire licensed psychologists who are trained to help kids struggling with their mental health in addition to the counselors already present. They can also release public service announcements telling kids "if you see something, say something."

The most disturbing part of the Oxford shooting was that some kids did see something. Students heard rumors of an impending school shooting three weeks before it happened. In response to these rumors, the OCSD issued a letter on November 12 saying that "student interpretations of social media posts and false information exacerbated the overall concern...there has been no threat to our building nor our students."

Less than a week before the shooting, the shooter posted a picture to Instagram of the gun he would use to murder four of his peers. That alone was enough to make some students stay home on the day the shooting occurred.

All the signs were there. The suspect was a textbook example of what the average student would describe as a school shooter. His intent could not have been more obvious. He posted a picture of a gun to his Instagram, drew an image of a school shooting and left it on his desk. And yet the administration did not even think to check his backpack.

It takes the entire community to prevent tragedies like what happened at Oxford High School: the students, teachers and administration. In Michigan, only two out of three were doing their part. To work towards a solution, Oxford School District should begin informing students about warning signs and make help available to students who demonstrate concerning behavior. Taking active steps is essential. As the shooting in Michigan has proven, apathy gets people killed.

