

AMHERST COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Post Office Box 1257
Amherst, Virginia 24521

Dr. Steven Nichols
Superintendent

www.amherst.k12.va.us
434-946-9387

Safety and Security in Amherst County Public Schools

Superintendent's Statement

Lately in the national news, we are informed of events where individuals have entered schools to commit harm to children. The Amherst County Public Schools (ACPS) have reviewed again school division Crisis Plans, and other procedures affecting student/ staff safety and security. Following are points of information in this regard:

- All schools have a Crisis Plan in place that addresses procedures to be followed in the event of a serious breach of the peace. These plans are specific to an individual school, and are vetted by the division's Safety Committee and local public safety agencies. Each Crisis Plan is reviewed and revised annually to reflect the latest information/ recommendations from these public service agencies. School-based coordination of efforts as well as an assessment of success is assigned to the Crisis Team (each school is required to have a functioning Crisis Team made up of school leadership, key staff, and School Resource Officer). All state and local police agencies, as well as Emergency Services, have current print and digitized copies of the individual Crisis Plans.
- Substitute Teachers are made aware that the Crisis Plan can be found in the same place in each school. As a part of their pre-service training, emergency drills and procedures are reviewed to make certain they are aware of steps to be taken.
- Schools are supported by three School Resource Officers, assigned by the Sheriff's Department, who work closely with the school's leadership to provide for threat assessment and steps to be taken to insure school security.
- All schools (including the Alternative Education Center) are equipped with cameras both inside and outside the building. There are presently more than 300 cameras in operation in and around all ACPS facilities. Additionally, all school buses are equipped with cameras and sound systems to monitor behavior, and to monitor the area immediately around the bus. In both systems, a record is made of all activity, and has been utilized in hearings in various scenarios to promote student safety. There are currently 75 camera equipped buses transporting young people.
- All schools are required to hold lock down drills as well as training with students to address issues of following directions, being observant, etc. Procedures within the school require teachers to monitor students, and maintain information as to the whereabouts of students in their care at all times. Student Emergency Care Cards (this card provides contact information and other material that may be needed in an emergency) are reprinted and made available to staff to insure information is in multiple spots for added security in

an emergency. It should be noted that ACPS conducts more drills than required by the state with these being totally unannounced to promote preparedness.

- Any class that is conducted outdoors for any reason (for example physical education), the adult assigned to the class carries a radio that is monitored in each school's Main Office should there be a call for assistance.
- No one is permitted to remove any child from school without (1) being listed as an appropriate individual (parent, grandparent, selected neighbors, etc. -- all as identified by the parent in advance on the care card) who is authorized to pick up the child, and (2) providing for inspection a current photo ID (this applies even if the individual is "known" by school staff).
- All schools hold drills in which a full school evacuation is conducted. All schools have an identified off-site facility where students, under proper direction, are moved in case of an evacuation order. Students/ staff are removed quickly from the building (even planning/ drill addresses the evacuation of handicapped individuals) following a silent protocol with hands on their heads (as directed by local public service agencies).
- All schools have camera/ entry buzzer access to school buildings. All exterior doors remain locked, any outside individual must be badged, and numerous radios are scattered throughout each building for access to an administrator. Students and staff are encouraged to stop and seek identification of all those without a badge. All classrooms have phone access to the Main Office. Each school is served by a School Resource Office, provided by the Amherst County Sheriff's Office.
- Administrative staff is trained in measures related to school safety/ security.
- Bus drivers have undergone training for safety procedures as well. Each driver is also tasked with being observant of areas around schools, and to utilize their on-bus radios to send a pre-determined coded message to the Transportation Office that would generate immediate calls to the police as well as the Central Office.
- All threats to the peace within a school facility are fully coordinated with local public safety agencies. Once involved, the Sheriff's Office takes control of the facility/ site.
- A specialized alert computer program, which was developed in house by the ACPS Technology Office, and placed on all adult controlled computers, allows for immediate notifications of a situation. This alert button, now on the toolbar of all adult-controlled computers, allows for the adult to send a pre-programmed, silent alert message to all adult computers within the building. This alert generates an immediate lock down situation until the matter can be resolved.
- Students throughout the division are never left in a situation where they are without supervision. Additionally, students are trained as to what to do should they be outside the classroom when a lock down is announced. Professional Development for all employees is provided in this regard to be certain they understand procedures so they may better protect the children.
- Each day, the principal conducts a perimeter walk of the school to insure there is an awareness to any activity/ changes to the area immediate to the school. Any unusual activity or situation is reported to local police and the Central Office.
- Under guidance from the Commonwealth of Virginia, students/ staff are trained in procedures to be followed during a tornado drill situation.

- The Central Office which houses the Superintendent and top level staff is being trained in procedures for lock down. The Central Office also maintains a Crisis Plan as well as participation in all Professional Development, drills, and training.
- When parents are to be notified, the school division will utilize every avenue at its disposal. The Message Alert system that uses phone and text, the division's web site, and local media would all be used. The ultimate aim is to keep all students/ staff safe at all times, and the families of these individuals informed.
- Working with the Amherst County Sheriff's Office, ACPS is developing training modules for Active Shooter training. The planning for this continues as we determine how to provide training without raising unnecessary fears.
- The school division is actively involved in state threat and security assessments made by the Virginia Department of Criminal Justice. These assessments require full reviews of process and procedure and the feed-back provided by VDCJ are used in improving our services.
- The school division has been awarded approximately \$275,000 state grants over the last five years for school safety from the Commonwealth of Virginia. Plans for all expenditures were committee developed, vetted by administrative staff, and again by Virginia Department of Justice before award.
- Some procedures for keeping schools safe are not made public for security reasons, but are a part of planning, training, and security.

Student/ staff safety and security remain a constant concern. These steps as outlined above are in place to promote that safe environment. It is not perfect as any school – anywhere - can still be attacked, but ACPS has taken concrete steps to protect “our kids.”



Dr. Steven Nichols
Superintendent

Spring 2018