

A Message From the Superintendent: Safety and Security in Hays CISD
May 25, 2022

Dear Hays CISD Family,

I share with you, our friends and neighbors in Uvalde, and people all over the world, the incredible sorrow and abject anger that this could and did happen again. I don't know if we will ever truly understand what could possibly make someone want to kill innocent children and at a place that is supposed to bring them great joy and excitement.

This is not the end-of-year email I had planned to send to you as we wrap up what, for us, has been a successful and productive year. We have so much to celebrate in Hays CISD and in public schools in Texas. And, we will do that. We have nearly 1,400 graduates who have earned more than \$12 million in scholarships. We have made tremendous gains in learning, closing the gaps we experienced because of the pandemic. We have students at all schools and in activities from fine arts to athletics that are enjoying state championships and other prestigious awards. We have so much for which we are grateful, yet we also have so much empathy and pain in our hearts for those who are hurting today.

I know it's a scary time and emotions are rightfully on high alert. At the end of this email, I am going to list for you some of the many things our district does and has done in the recent past to continuously create the safest possible school environment. I hope this brings you some reassurance, but I also know that no matter how long the list, it is never enough. Improving campus safety is a never-ending job and despite all that we do, we always have room to grow in our efforts. It's imperative that we continue to grow because without safety – nothing else matters. Nothing.

I wish we could eliminate evil in this world. We cannot. So, I will stay laser focused on what we can do. Our community is unique and diverse. We have many who are not afraid to express their ideas, thoughts, opinions, and demands. I appreciate that. I want that. In Hays CISD, we work together to solve big challenges. As we all navigate our full response to this latest horrific tragedy, know that there is no one "right answer." I suspect we'll all be exposed to very passionate arguments on what we as a district, state, and nation should do. We need to have these conversations. Let us concentrate on what we can do – what we can agree on – and not what divides us. We can set the standard and the tone.

Eric

IMPORTANT HAYS CISD SAFETY LINKS:

Hays CISD Safety & Security Homepage: <https://www.hayscisid.net/safety>
Hays CISD Safety & Security Reporting: <https://www.hayscisid.net/hope>

RESOURCES TO TALK WITH CHILDREN FOLLOWING A CRISIS:

The National Child Traumatic Stress Network has a wealth of resources to help you and your family navigate discussions and personal responses to the Uvalde Shooting. <https://www.nctsn.org/> (Note: Their website appears to be experiencing heavy traffic right now in response to Uvalde and you may have trouble connecting right away)

Tip Sheet for talking with your child (on our website): www.hayscisd.net/talk (In Spanish: www.hayscisd.net/talkSPN)

RECENT HAYS CISD SAFETY IMPROVEMENTS:

Creation of a District Office of Safety and Security: In 2018, the district created a dedicated staff position, with the sole job of keeping our students and staff safe. Prior to the creation of this position, components of the district's safety and security protocols were housed in different departments. The district is fortunate to have in this position, Jeri Skrocki, as our safety and security director. She has 30 years' experience as a leader in the Hays County Sheriff's Office and was recognized statewide by the governor for her advancement of school safety protocols.

At Monday's Board meeting, a day before the Uvalde shooting, the Board voted to expand this office with additional staff and resources for next school year.

Secure Vestibules: New campuses are constructed with secure vestibules that limit the ability for people to enter without being buzzed in. Beginning with the 2014 Bond and the entryway remodeling of Barton Wallace, and Dahlstrom Middle Schools; the district has spent the past several years configuring older buildings to create these vestibules. All campus now require entry through secure vestibules.

Bullet Resistant Glass Film: Since the Santa Fe, Texas, High School shooting, the district commenced a program to install bullet resistant film on windows within all campuses. This film makes breaking through a glass window incredibly difficult and can slow bullets significantly. All windows now have this film in place.

Security Monitors: Since 2018, the district installed security monitors in all front offices, to allow each key camera to be monitored by an actual person at all times.

Upgraded Security Cameras: Included in the 2017 bond, the district replaced all old analog cameras with higher resolution digital cameras. Additionally, camera coverage has expanded in the past decade from cameras primarily focused on perimeter security to include interior security as well. Law enforcement now also has the ability to view district cameras remotely and from any device during and emergency.

Upgraded Phone Systems: As part of the 2014 bond, the district upgraded all phone systems at every campus to be compatible with enhanced 9-1-1 systems. This allows first responders to pinpoint the exact location on campus of a 9-1-1 call that may be made during an emergency.

Texas Suspicious Activity Reporting Network: Following the tragic shooting at Santa Fe High School, the state created fusion centers that are staffed 24-hours a day at iWatch Texas. These central reporting centers are able to utilize the latest in technology to investigate threats made to schools and on social media.

Hays Hopeline: Approximately 10 years ago, the district created the Hays Hopeline – a way for students and parents to report mental health concerns, to make outcries for themselves or others, or to report concerns about campus safety threats.

See Something, Say Something: This district emphasizes that all eyes and all ears are critical to preventing potential threats. Children and parents are encouraged to report all concerns to campus adults, district leadership, or on the iWatchTexas and Hays Hopeline. Several potential threats in the previous decade have been reported and prevented because of students and parents who came forward with concerns.

100% Hays CISD: There are many benefits to having students involved in clubs and activities – one of which is helping to build relationships between students and adults. Students who are involved and connected are less isolated and have a better chance of feeling comfortable confiding in an adult on campus regarding any safety or mental health concerns for themselves or their peers.

Removal of Fire Alarm Pull Stations: in 2018, and in response to new tactics learned by previous school shootings, the district began upgrading fire systems at campuses that would allow schools to remove fire alarm pull stations that can be used by intruders to cause confusion during a lockdown.

Standard Response Protocol: The district has adopted a standardize protocol to respond to emergencies, so that schools, students, and first responders know what to expect from each other during an emergency. Hays County was the first in Texas and the nation to adopt a county-wide standard response protocol under the leadership and direction of a team which included our now safety and security director, Jeri Skrocki.

Regular Trainings and Exercises: As part of the district’s standard response protocol, students and staff train with law enforcement and first responders every year. Additionally, during times when students are not in Hays CISD buildings, the district allows first responders to train for emergencies to help them become familiar with each of our buildings.

Law Enforcement Response Tactics: Since the Columbine School Shooting a little more than 20 years ago, law enforcement officers have changed tactics to now immediately engage an active shooter on campus rather than set up a perimeter and try negotiations. Sadly, most school shootings are over in a matter of minutes; but the improved, faster response tactic have saved lives.

ID Badges Required: The district has continuously expanded and improved its ID badge requirements for all people on a campus. This helps staff monitor whether someone is legitimately allowed to be on a campus. This is why the district consistently emphasizes the need for everyone to wear their badges at all times.

Additional School Resources Officers: The district has added new school resource officers (SROs) to campuses during the past decade. Secondary schools have dedicated SROs assigned on campus.

Strong Partnership with Law Enforcement and First Responders: Hays CISD maintains incredibly strong and cooperative relationships with our local police officers, sheriff’s office deputies, fire and EMS departments, and emergency management offices. These relationships matter in being able to assess and respond to threats.

Other Investigative and Response Tactics: With each school shooting, we learn how those who intend to do harm attempt to breach security protocols. The district has in place many safety protocols that are not public so that these tactics are better shielded from potential evil actors. These tactics and response

strategies are reviewed and updated regularly, combining what we learn and best practices from what others learn across the country.