

TPSD Ahead Of The Curve When It Comes To Safety

TUPELO, Miss. — If there is a priority for all schools across the nation, as well as throughout the world, it's safety.

Plain and simple, the goal of all districts is to make sure every student who enters the school doors every morning exits safely when the final bell rings. And the Tupelo Public School District is certainly no different.

In fact, at the annual Mississippi Association of School Superintendents conference that was held in Jackson this past July, safety officials informed the TPSD leadership it was ahead of the curve when it comes to all facets of safety.

Be rest assured, however, that assurance won't lead to complacency.

Assistant Superintendent Andy Cantrell, who oversees all safety measures, said he and his staff constantly look at ways to stay ahead of the game and to always be forward thinking. It's the "what could happen" theory that motivates him to always be at least two steps ahead of what an unlawful person could be planning.

"You can't predict what might happen, but you can predict how we will respond to an incident," he said. "A good safety plan comes from what might happen. A great safety plan has a team-like action approach focusing on the probability of what will happen."

It's preparation, preparedness and more preparation. And it's a overall commitment to never let your guard down.

"You have to be strongly committed to being proactive and staying ahead of the curve," Cantrell said. "It's the concern of every parent. But I want everyone to know it's a No. 1 priority for everyone in the school district."

There are three keys to ensure school safety — communication, resources and intense focus on safety.

With communication, it's critical everyone understands the overall safety plan. EVERYONE.

With resources come human capital, training and equipment.

And when it comes to intense focus on safety, it's making sure everyone knows they have a responsibility to keep an eye open at all times and to never assume.

So, what are some of the components to Tupelo being ahead of the curve?

First and foremost, there is now a command post at the Fillmore Center. The school district currently has 500-plus cameras throughout the district monitoring all campuses and buildings. There are cameras on the outside and well as inside that are monitored 24-hours a day, seven days a week.

"Eyes in the sky are important," Cantrell said. "Those cameras are a vital tool. What's just as important is providing the human capital to observe and monitor what is happening. Security cameras help after a situation occurs. With an officer monitoring those cameras, we can prevent various issues before they begin serious."

Nearly every school has now installed secondary entrance ways as another source of improving campus security, and visitors can only enter after being confirmed through a secured intercom/video system.

In addition, protective film has been placed on most windows, and while they aren't bullet proof, they prevent an intruder from accessing our interior classrooms. Our purpose for the film is to buy time for additional law enforcement to arrive.

"I want our community to know we are constantly looking and studying all the new protective measures that's being offered," Cantrell said. "We have security personnel at every school who are very vigilant, and we've noticed everyone is becoming more aware of their surroundings. It takes a community-wide effort to stay on top of safety, and that's one of the areas that makes Tupelo so special."