



Illustration by Phineas Alexander.

IN CASE OF EMERGENCY

Incidents throughout the 2015-16 Clarke Central school year have tested emergency protocol and administrative methods on campus.

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During the 2015-16 school year, incidents such as a reported sexual assault, mercury spill, gang-related fights, two students trapped inside the school elevator, possession of weapons and other emergency situations have occurred on the Clarke Central High School campus or involved CCHS students.

The procedures outlined in the Clarke County School District's "Emergency Management Plan" dictate how teachers, security officers and administrators are to respond to emergencies, while the "Code of Conduct" indicates procedure in response to student behavior.

"We (administrators) are in constant communication with each other. That's what's to prevent incidents from happening at our school," Principal Dr. Robbie P. Hooker said.

EMERGENCY PLANNING

Each year, teachers are provided with an "Emergency Management Plan" binder from the Clarke County School District, which outlines a "comprehensive framework for district and county wide emergency management," as stated in the promulgation statement.

"I make sure that I have the proper signage in my rooms and know where my emergency notebook is which tells me the protocol for each emergency," math department co-chair Heather Julian said. "During a situation, I also have an attendance sheet for each class to ensure every student is where they need to be. I then make sure my students are cared for."

Emergency operations described in the binder include general incident procedures, threats of violence or terrorism, building and hazardous material emergencies and natural disasters.

"It all depends on the situation. With fires, you always evacuate. For weather instances, our main priority is sheltering students first. In hard and soft lockdowns, administrators manage the environment," Associate Principal Marie Yuran said.

With ongoing changes to the campus due to construction, the administrative team meets regularly with the construction manager to assess all aspects of renovations, including emergency planning.

"When we meet with the construction manager Joe Dunagan, he informs us on any changes with construction that might affect an exit route or exit spot for students to meet," Yuran said.

Throughout the year, there are monthly drills to prepare students and teachers for emergency situations. Drills are unannounced to students and teachers.

"We want to see if our students can get out in the amount of time we need to get out in, and that students can find the multiple routes to get to where they need to be," Yuran said.

In spite of monthly drills, junior Maddie Herrington does not feel prepared to follow procedure in emergency situations.

"I understand that this is high school, and it's not gonna be perfect, but I don't always know what to do (during emergency drills), which scares me because what if it actually happened?" Herrington said. "We need to be more detailed when teaching drills because you're never gonna know how students will react in a situation until it happens. I just hope my ignorance on what to do in an emergency due to lack of instruction doesn't cost me my safety."

Earlier this year, Herrington took part in a tornado warning drill to simulate emergency response to a tornado in the area. The "Emergency Management Plan" indicates that students and teachers "go at once to designated severe weather shelter areas and have students get into the emergency safety position."

"Any time a student comes to an administrator about something falling under school violations, we quickly investigate. We put everything aside. You don't take those things lightly."

--DR. ROBBIE P. HOOKER,
principal

"With tornado drills this year, because of all the construction it's very chaotic. During the drill, I was put in front of a window for a long time before everyone settled down and teachers could start seeing the flaws," Herrington said.

Another common drill simulated throughout the school year is a lockdown, "a protective action employed to safeguard students, faculty, staff, and visitors when there is an imminent threat approaching the campus, on campus, or in the school."

Sophomore Maya Jones feels that the current procedures for lockdown drills do not prepare her for safeguarding from these "imminent threats."

"I feel like our lockdown drills aren't where they need to be. We just hide behind desks. If the intruder finds a way into the classroom, a desk isn't much protection against a gun," Jones said. "Every time we have the drills, it's always when I'm in class, but what happens if (an imminent threat) happens during transition? That's where I'm worried."

Yuran, however, contests that perception may not be reality in some cases, and invites students to continue to notify administration of concerns.

"If you're feeling uncomfortable, stop and talk to security or any administrator. We'll be happy to talk with you about it. Often times, I might have infor-

mation that I can dispel whatever it is you were really worried about," Yuran said. "Clarke Central has a culture where we want our kids to be and feel safe. Students want that as well. They have certainly reported things to us in order for our school to be safe. That's any partnership that we could ask for."

On Jan. 28, Clarke Central's emergency protocols regarding hazardous materials were put to the test when a mercury spill occurred in a science class.

"With the mercury spill, we quickly evacuated the area and turned off all ventilation to the classroom. Students were accessed by our school nurse. In addition, (CCSD) Plant Services sent a HazMat company to clean the minor spill," Yuran said. "Because of their expertise and training of being scientists, they knew what protocols should be followed and we were fully prepared."

INCIDENTS AND CONDUCT

Beyond emergency situations, the "Code of Conduct" indicates procedures for both "illegal" and "disruptive" behavior. Illegal behavior includes incidents involving weapons, drugs and illegal substances, bullying, theft, sexual misconduct and verbal/physical aggression, while disruptive behavior can consist of insubordination, cheating, rude or disrespectful behavior and sexual harassment.

"The first thing we do in a situation involving any sexual activity, guns or things of that nature is we file a police report," Hooker said. "We then investigate the incident and implement the necessary consequences."

Throughout the school year, altercations of physical aggression have occurred, including an incident on Sept. 15, 2015, in which administration and the Athens-Clarke County Police Department looked into possible gang affiliations. In the event of a physical altercation, security is to be called.

"My job is to try and diffuse the altercation. I must get one if not both away from where the fight took place," security officer Leroy Owens said.

While Owens is clear on his role during an altercation, social studies department teacher Stephen Hinson says that faculty do not receive specific instructions on handling altercations.

"(The administrative team doesn't) really tell us anything," Hinson said. "But I know as an adult male that my role is to break up fights. I've broken up a lot of fights, but I haven't had to break one up in a long time on my hall."

Following such incidents, consequences and punishments are determined according to the severity of the issue and at the discretion of administrators at suspension hearings, says Yuran.

"If there are things of illegal behavior like drugs or alcohol, those typically end up at a hearing. The severity of the incident is what matters. Students have gone to a hearing before for truancy because over a period of time, they have continued to be truant or chronically misbehave," Yuran says. "If a student is struggling, we have to show what support as a school we have provided for that student or how we've involved the parent."

On Feb. 22, Hooker notified parents and students of an alleged unwanted sexual advance that had happened earlier that same day. On May 6, Hooker wrote the CCHS community again about an alleged off-campus sexual assault involving CCHS students, which had occurred in March.

These incidents both come after an alleged on-campus rape, which would fall under the Code of Conduct's "Sexual Misconduct" section, was reported on Jan. 7 at Cedar Shoals High School. ACCPD began an external investigation, but the alleged perpetrators were not removed from the school until their arrests, two on Jan. 30 and one on Feb. 1.

"Any time a student comes to an administrator about something falling under school violations, we quickly investigate. We put everything aside. You don't take those things lightly. You can't," Hooker said. "Even an allegation of that sort that may not be believed to be true, I take it seriously every time."

NOTIFYING THE COMMUNITY

The next step after a serious situation occurs at CCHS, Hooker says, is contacting CCSD personnel.

"At the beginning of the school year, we had a lot of fights, some of which were gang-related. Of course we quickly sent home letters to parents, but the first thing I did was contacted (Superintendent) Dr. (Philip) Lanoue saying,

"This is what we've done so far," Hooker said.

Hooker will then draft an email notifying parents of details on the incident in an effort to achieve transparency.

"At least three to four times this year, I've sent home letters informing parents about the mercury spill, there was a fake gun, there were other issues. But you always must keep parents informed immediately. You don't wait two or three days later," Hooker said.

CHANGES AND FUTURE CONCERNS

The safety rules assigned by the "Code of Conduct" have not yet been re-evaluated, according to Yuran, but a public forum was held by the CCSD on April 7 at the H.T. Edwards Complex for the district community to discuss discipline.

"I can't think of a time where there's been a significant change in protocol. I'm not personally aware of any changes being made at the current moment," Yuran said. "Our Code of Conduct may be slightly adjusted, but our changes are often in response of situations happening across the U.S., like the increasing number of school shootings happening."

Assistant Principal Reginald Thomas, however, has made plans to secure student safety in the Freshman Academy in the coming year.

"Next year, the Freshman Academy will be on the third floor where it's a little more isolated. We've talked about restricting that area to only freshman students," Thomas said. "We have to be extra careful when 17 and 18 year olds are going to school with 14 year olds. You have to monitor that a lot."

Freshman Haviland Ford would like to see more progress on conduct issues.

"I can walk down the hallway and have someone touch my butt or call me names or comment on what I'm wearing and nothing's said or done about it," Ford said. "That's gonna happen in life. There's not always gonna be someone there to hold my hand by helping me or saying something to the perpetrator, but it would be nice to have someone to stop it, especially at school."

Despite these occurrences, Hooker looks toward increasing the trust between the CCHS administration and staff, parents, students and the community.

"Everything goes back to trust. You have to trust the people you work with and who are in charge, that they are telling us the truth and are handling this," Hooker said. "I trust our school and our community."



Below: NOT JUST A DRILL: Junior Maddie Herrington stands in front of the doorway in a first floor West Wing corridor where she was directed to sit during a tornado drill earlier this school year. Herrington expressed concerns about safety measures during actual severe weather. "During the drill, I was put right in front of a window for a long time before everyone settled down and teachers could start seeing the flaws," Herrington said.

Photo by Tierra Hayes.

