

Layers of security

School administration highlight the expected safety protocol among high school students

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In the wake of the mass shooting of Las Vegas, security has become a topic of conversation, as the deadliest mass shooter in US history smuggled 23 guns into the Mandalay Bay hotel.

Hotels, schools, businesses -- all make security a top priority and are all examining their policies after the latest mass shooting. Campus security manager Amy McCarthy offers how Wando upholds security.

"Dr. [Sherry] Eppelsheimer has made some announcements that are district driven, in order to bring attention to weapons on campus," McCarthy said, "what is considered a weapon, what those consequences are if someone brings a weapon on campus. We're constantly evaluating those safety and security protocol to see if there's something we can do better in somewhere that we're lacking... We work closely with the district to update those security measures, like checking IDs at the front gate."

Because of recent shootings and events of bringing handguns into various schools in Charleston County, a new plan has been developed to help increase security and decrease the chances of a shooting happening here.

"Every time a major incident happens anywhere in the country, especially one that happens in a school, we always try to take at the details of that situation and test our plans against what happened. If we see there's a shooting in a school... number one is how do we prevent that situation and what changes do we need to make to the plan. If you look at school security from 20 years ago versus today, it's a completely different mindset," said Michael Reidenbach, head of the of security management of Charleston County School District.

McCarthy said the school has "layers" of security to keep the school safe.

"We have a very safe campus. We're fortunate enough to have layers of security built in for us already. We would start at the front entrance and make sure we have a secure perimeter," McCarthy said. "There are two locations where people can walk in, but as far as vehicular traffic, letting people in there that aren't supposed to be here. We do have a screening process at the visitor's center, and it is manned from 8:45 until about 3:30 everyday."

One of the layers is observing the campus at all times.

"We also have over 300 cameras on campus, so if we have any indication that somebody is on campus that shouldn't be or something is brought to our attention of safety or security concerns then we can certainly view those cameras and get a good idea of who that person is or where they came in or how they exited," McCarthy added.

Along with staff and faculty, Wando has specialists that help Wando's safety when teacher's eyes are elsewhere.

"We also have four school resource officers on campus,

who are sworn police officers from the Mount Pleasant Police Department and they are assigned as school resource officers," McCarthy said. "We have 11 student concern specialists, who are liaisons between, faculty, staff and students... they man the visitor center, patrol our parking lots throughout the day and check our perimeter, and especially checking our doors to make sure they're locked during instruction. They check IDs, making sure that people who have entered the building have checked in at the main office. My positions focus solely on security. So those are just some of the things that help us here at Wando."

Putting security in place for a school as big as Wando is necessary. But many of the students and teachers are unsure of the measures taken to protect students, faculty and staff. Reidenbach elaborates on present or future plans that will help the safety of Wando.

"You've probably heard the announcements that Dr. Eppelsheimer has made over the PA about them [weapons] and that's all a part of the plan to help address the topic that this has been an issue," he said. "This [weapons at school] is something that will not be tolerated."

Having the open conversation about weapons will allow students to help with keeping Wando safe and that there are officers here to assist students, Reidenbach said.

"When we talk about weapons, not just guns, but pepper spray, tasers or anything else that can inflict harm, there are penalties if you do that and more importantly if you have information about a weapon being on campus or about somebody who might bring one on campus," he said. "That's the first part of the plan. The second part is developing student focus groups and not only talk about weapons on school grounds, but other campus safety. We're thinking of producing a video to show to the students of Charleston County and that's being storyboarded."

A new question in the security plan is whether metal detectors should be used and how much would it help.

"There are obvious discussions about would metal detectors be appropriate in schools...is it to the point we need metal detectors at every entrance or a more random basis?" he said. "It's important to us that we develop plans that are effective and that are truly going to give us improved safety rather than just a feeling of improved safety."

Even with the plans in place, there is always the concern of implementing them.

"A common challenge to instill in everyone: faculty, staff and students, is that we need to be concerned about safety at all times. We need to develop a culture where security is always on

our minds. It shouldn't consume us and keep us from focusing on what we're there for, but we should always be attuned to it," Reidenbach said.

But a major part of the problem is thinking the school will always be safe, but every bit can majorly help or hurt security.

"If someone needs to run out to their car to grab something, and they prop open a door... and they think, 'well I'll just be gone for 30 seconds, I'm just running out to my car, I'll be right back.' We need to keep in the forefront of our mindset that we can't do that because within that time frame somebody could slip in. So that one action just defeated the millions of dollars we invest at the schools. It just takes one person to put a rock in a door to hurt the system. The challenge that we always have is just for people to adhere to the regulation," Reidenbach said.

With the all the investments that go into security, it truly relies on the students and faculty to do their part to help keep Wando a safe environment.

"Following the protocol we have in place is key. Everybody tends to get a little bit complacent when it comes to wearing their IDs, checking everyone that they have some kind of identification on when they enter the building, be very aware of your surroundings is important," McCarthy said. "When students come in from the parking lots, they need to be checking if there's anyone in the parking lot that look out of place when they're walking from their classes. When they [students] come from the outside, don't let anyone in that doesn't have an ID even if it is somebody they think is a student..."

Above all, everyone can help with the problem. All it takes is communicating about the problem so Wando can avoid a tragedy as was seen in Las Vegas and many, many others.

"If you see something, say something. If you see a door propped open, take the extra step to close it," McCarthy said. "Everyone needs to take an active role in making sure that our school stays safe and secure."

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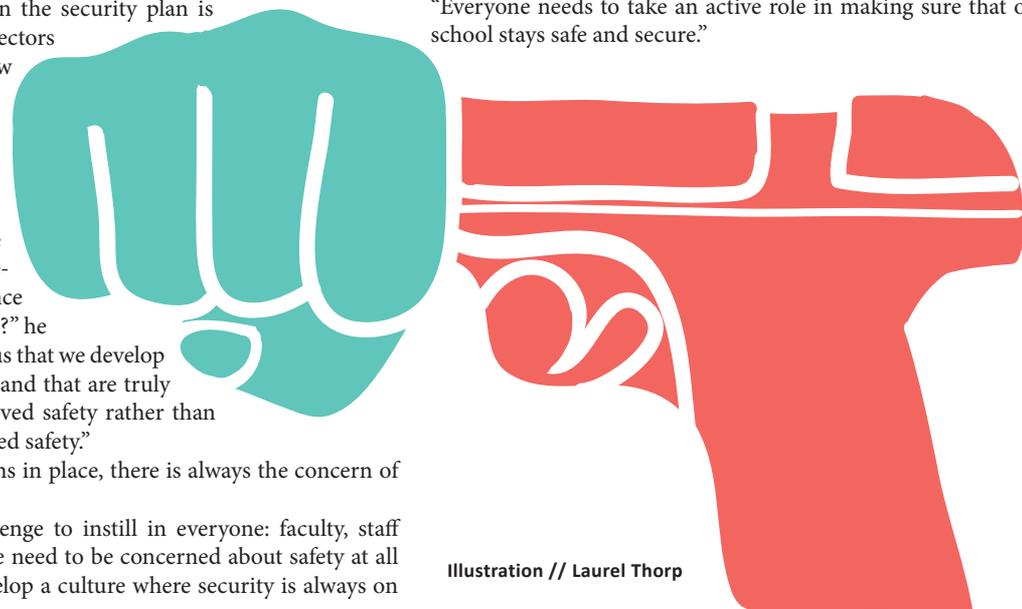


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