



July 15, 2018

Dear Parents and Community Members,

Adhering to the idea that Springtown ISD’s students will be “safe, secure, and successful” requires that we continuously review a broad spectrum of programs and procedures across every department in the District. The “safe and secure” portion of our motto is the focus of this message. As many of you know, tragic incidents last spring in Parkland, Florida, and Santa Fe, Texas, warrant that we be especially active in evaluating our buildings, trainings, and policies related to maintaining a safe environment for our all our stakeholders.

In the final weeks of the last school year, some of you noticed physical changes and security upgrades to our campuses. I assure you that a great deal more work has been done “behind the scenes” and may not be publicly known; advertising the location of “trouble spots” prior to implementing remedies and enhancements would not be in anyone’s best interests. A potential change to important Board Policies, however, does warrant public notification and a desire for input from our community.

Having already committed to hiring an additional School Resource Officer (SRO) to join our staff, our Trustees are also considering adopting School Marshal and/or School Guardian programs as an additional layer of safety and security for our schools. I want to assure you all that our Trustees and I have spent a great deal of time and energy cautiously examining and discussing local options with one another as well informed professionals from other districts, law enforcement officers, and government officials. This process has been very time consuming (as it should), but in no way an obligation we have shied away from.

Our Trustees and I are requesting feedback from our stakeholders regarding the two programs mentioned above: the “School Marshal” and the “School Guardian” (aka “Defender”) programs. Each program is designed to provide an armed defense option for school employees to help protect students in emergency situations while waiting on a law enforcement response. If adopted, such programs must be included in District’s overall security plan. The programs may be adopted in combination with one another or as stand-alone programs. ***Summaries of the programs are as follows:***

School Marshal Program

Laws allowing a School Marshal Program are found in Texas Education Code 37.0811. Passed as the Protection of Texas Children Act in 2013, the program gives local school districts the option of appointing “School Marshals.” After applying to the Texas Commission on Law



Enforcement, qualifying institutions must send candidates to an 80 hour training course conducted by a law enforcement academy that has been specifically prepared to provide the School Marshal curriculum. Topics covered in the School Marshal course include physical security, improving the security of the campus, use of force, active shooter response, and weapon proficiency. No other courses may be substituted, nor can an individual district exempt a candidate from a portion of the specific School Marshal training courses identified in law.

According to news reports, very few Texas school districts have appointed School Marshals at this time, though the state has granted fifty districts permission to do so, with forty more waiting to be approved. In Texas, School Marshals may not carry concealed weapons if their job involves "direct, regular student contact." In that case, weapons must be locked and secured on school premises and within the Marshal's immediate reach. Key elements of the School Marshal program include the following:

- Established through The Protection of Texas Children Act (TX Education Code 37.0811)
- Cannot be anyone whose primary duties include regular, direct contact with students
- Allows no more than 1 marshal per 400 students
- Requires psychiatric exam and at least 80 hours of training related to:
 - prevention strategies / securing safety of stakeholders
 - duties of peace officers and the use of deadly force
 - effective law enforcement strategies/techniques
 - proficiency with a handgun
 - using deadly force in an active shooter situation
- Supported by Governor Abbott and President Trump
- Recently adopted by Granbury ISD
- Establishes a new class of peace officers as last line of defense
- Prohibits teachers from "carrying," though a teacher could have a firearm stored in a safe in their room

School Guardian / Defender Program

As an alternative (or perhaps in conjunction with) a School Marshal program, Texas Government Code 411.1901 allows local districts to arm employees through "School Guardian" (aka "School Defender") programs. Districts choosing to adopt Guardian programs may allow certain employees access to handguns on campus for use in emergency situations (such as active shooter incidents) while awaiting a law enforcement response. Policies authorizing an employee such access should include significant training, psychological exams, and CHL/LTC licensure prior to CONSIDERING approval. Ongoing training and practice requirements are also standard in such policies. "Guardian" programs appear to have been implemented in over 200 school districts in Texas.



School Guardians have no law enforcement responsibilities, and have only one purpose: to protect students from an active shooter until law enforcement officials arrive. Key elements of the program include:

- School Safety Training (through TX Govt. Code 411.1901) determined by local Board of Trustees in consultation with local law enforcement officials
- Number of “Guardians” in each school is determined by Trustees
- Training requirements (regarding the number of hours) are determined by the local Board of Trustees, but must be provided by a licensed instructor
- Other requirements determined by local Trustees typically include:
 - *Psychiatric evaluation / DPS–approved training*
 - *Type of weapon and ammunition (“frangible” / TCOLE)*
 - *Frequency of “range” practice*
 - *Coordination with law enforcement (local and county)*
 - *Storage of weapon*
 - *Strict confidentiality rules*
 - *Minimum of eighteen months of service in the District*
- Adopted last month by Weatherford ISD’s Board of Trustees; other Parker County districts with "Defender" programs include Brock, Peaster, and Millsap ISD’s.
- Over 200 other Texas school districts have opted to adopt programs allowing highly trained and vetted staff members access to firearms
- Does NOT automatically allow anyone with LTC/CHL to bring weapons into a prohibited area (i.e. classroom settings including playground and practice areas)
- Relevant local board policies include CKE, CKC, and DH (at minimum)

Our Trustees and I would appreciate feedback regarding options to arm highly trained, well-vetted employees. Please consider accessing and completing our survey through the link below:

<https://goo.gl/forms/yG6vlgsWfIXo28AZ2>

Thank you in advance for any feedback you might be willing to provide. Our Trustees and our entire staff understand the significance of this matter.

Sincerely,

Mike Kelley, Supt.
Springtown ISD

