

Montgomery County school districts beef up security

By Jennifer Summer and Michelle Iracheta Updated 10:17 pm, Tuesday, May 22, 2018

Photo: Michael Minasi, Staff Photographer / Houston Chronicle



Rebecca Fox, of Students Demand Action, hands out candles during a vigil for the victims of the Santa Fe High School shooting on Saturday, May 19, 2018, at the intersection of Interstate-45 and Sawdust Road in Spring.



Attendees are pictured during a vigil for the victims of the Santa Fe High School shooting on Saturday, May 19, 2018, at the intersection of Interstate-45 and Sawdust Road in Spring.



A sign is pictured during a vigil for the victims of the Santa Fe High School shooting on Saturday, May 19, 2018, at the intersection of Interstate-45 and Sawdust Road in Spring.

Since the deadly shooting at Santa Fe High School Friday, the Montgomery County Attorney's Office reports they have not received any calls regarding students making threats because of their proactive responses to previous incidents. According to Montgomery County Attorney J D Lambright, before the incident in Santa Fe, his office handled approximately 35 students for making threats against fellow students, teachers and/or a school following the deadly shooting at Parkland High School in February.

“Word spreads quickly about what happens when a student is arrested for making a threat,” Lambright said. “When a student is detained for making a threat, they spend anywhere from 3-4 weeks going through counseling in our juvenile detention program and in the worst cases, they are placed outside of their home environment. It’s not all fun and games.”

Lambright and his office hope this sends a message to students thinking of making a threat in Montgomery County that they are going to take each case extremely serious. “We are thankful for all of the work we have completed this school year,” Lambright added. “We work to be proactive and err on the side of caution when it comes to students and threats.”

Lambright also added their juvenile cases notably drop during the upcoming summer months, not because children are not committing crimes but they are not getting caught since they are not in school. “We all need to remain vigilant,” Lambright said.

Montgomery ISD safety initiatives

In an effort to increase safety across all Montgomery ISD campuses, the main expense the district has incurred includes the creation of the Montgomery ISD Police Department. The district uses bond funding to increase safety at all MISD campuses.

“Montgomery ISD has spent millions increasing safety at our campuses,” Montgomery ISD Superintendent Dr. Beau Rees said. “Since our schools are so spread out and not all within the city limits of Montgomery and the Montgomery Police Department is too small, we have committed to having our own force.” They currently have a force of seven officers and one police chief.

“We have armed officers stationed at every secondary campus all day, every day and officers stationed at every elementary school for a portion of each day,” Rees added. “The officers also provide traffic patrol and security for campus and district events.” Improvements to increase safety include a secure, front entry with bullet-resistant glass at all campuses, requiring all visitors to be “buzzed” in and background checks performed on anyone entering our schools, upgrades in camera and security surveillance at all campuses, replacement of every classroom’s door hardware with safety hardware, increase staff training in all safety security protocols as well as ways to spot students experiencing difficulty or stress.

‘Heightened alert’ in Conroe ISD

Conroe Independent School District officials say they are on “heightened alert” and taking extra precautions to ensure the safety of students and staff since the shooting at Santa Fe High School.

Conroe ISD Police Chief William Harness said the district will have “extra officers working extended hours” to cover more territory during the final days of the school year. - “The active shooter situations that we’ve had in other school districts and other states have heightened the awareness of the public, have heightened the awareness of all educators and police departments; not just school police departments,” Harness said. “We’re sensitive to that. So yes, a part of what we’re doing is making sure that we are doing the prudent thing, the cautionary thing for the safety of our kids.”

Conroe ISD Police Sgt. Matt Blakelock said he’d like to stress to parents that Conroe ISD police undergo regular training that includes school safety, campus security in active shooter training and training on how to handle people with mental health issues. “We take

every threat seriously," he said. "The biggest thing — and I think chief would probably agree —if we can encourage parents to talk their kids, report things if they see things."

District officials encourage students, parents, and staff to be vigilant. Please report any suspicious activity or suspected dangers to the appropriate authorities. Anonymous reports may be made to Conroe ISD's KidChat hotline at 1-888-KidChat (543-2428).

No backpacks, bags in Splendora ISD

For the remainder of the school year, there will be an increased presence of the Splendora ISD Police Department and parents are requested to not send students to school with backpacks or bags and all students are requested to take off jackets and hooded sweatshirts.

"As a school community, we must all work together to face the new reality we have been given," Splendora ISD representatives said in a letter sent out to parents Monday. "We will continue to review all safety measures for the remainder of the year and over the summer and will continue to provide proactive communication. Our top priority continues to be the safety of our students, staff and schools."

For any threats to student safety, everyone is encouraged to use the anonymous TipLine located on the app and district's website. To report any threats, visit <https://www.splendoraisd.org/Page/458>.

More police presence in Magnolia ISD

Additional security personnel at the junior and high schools as well increasing their budget to have full-time certified police officers at every campus starting in August are a few of the many measures Magnolia ISD is undertaking to ensure safety of their students.

"We will continue to have discussions with elected board members and with law enforcement officials regarding changes in our facilities as the evolving norm changes around our state and country," Magnolia ISD Superintendent Dr. Todd Stephens said in a letter sent home to parents. "With all of that said, I can also say that another important security measure can be found in building caring relationships with each other and in sharing information and concerns with the proper authorities. Using a confidential tip line like Anonymous Alerts is so important."

At the district, the Montgomery County Precinct 5 Constables Office provides security resource officers and at the board meeting Monday night, Captain Billy Masden updated board members of security measures in place. "We will also be working with federal agencies including Homeland Security who specialize in evaluating security assessments and in implementing strategies for safety planning," Stephens said. "Through these partnerships, we continue to bring tighter safety measures and procedures including our campus security audits and using best practices."

To report incidents in Magnolia ISD, students, staff and parents can log reports either through the app or on the homepage of the district website (www.anonymoualerts.com/magnoliaisd/). This is monitored by administrators 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.