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Durant High School

September 26, 2024

Durant implements new safety precautions

By Allison Toft

Durant's new safety team met this summer with the principal at Perry High School, the site of a school shooting Jan. 4 that killed a student and the high school's former principal.

"To talk and hear about what the school did prior, during and after the active event that happened was a good experience," said Durant School Resource Officer Joshua Bujalski.

"So some of the new procedures and safety precautions that we are doing here at Durant is what we learned from the principal," Officer Bujalski said.

In addition to meeting the Perry principal, Durant High School has made numerous updates in security this year, thanks to two Iowa Safety Improvement grants totaling \$100,000.

Officer Bujalski helped to put these into place, along with others on the safety team.

That team includes Mr. Joe Burnett, superintendent; Mr. Joel Diederichs, high school principal; Mrs. Rebecca Stineman, elementary school principal; Mrs. Mary Dorris, school nurse; Mrs. Kristy Badtram, guidance counselor; Mrs. Laurie Botkins, technology coordinator; Mrs. Abigail Straube and Mr. Brent Schmidt, student

services coordinators; Mrs. Maria Brown, director of instruction and innovation; Ms. Kristin Milotte, PK-6 guidance counselor; Mr. Richard Creamer, transportation director; and Mr. Tom Wuestenberg, maintenance director.

One of the updates, part of Governor Kim Reynolds' School Safety Initiative, is two radios with red emergency buttons that can be used during a school emergency when phone lines may be tied up.

"The new law calls for each school to get an emergency radio that was just a school channel to their local 911 center," Officer Bujalski said.

Safety buckets are another new protocol to be used during an emergency. These buckets include a blanket, duct tape, wet wipes, a wound kit, a stop-the-bleed kit, band-aids, a trash bag, and feminine hygiene products that can also be used to stop a wound from bleeding.

In the event of the emergency, each teacher is required to have these buckets with them, and when Durant conducted its first tornado drill Aug. 29, teachers brought the buckets with them. The way the school conducts fire drills has also been changed. In the past, students evacuated the building. However, Officer Bujalski changed the procedure, so students will wait in classrooms

until the drill is finished.

"There have been a few times across our country that bad people have hurt people by pulling the fire alarm and getting them out in the hallways to hurt them," he said in explaining the change in procedure.

In addition, the school has started limiting the number of doors in use to just three to keep the school secure: the door to the high school commons, the door to the elementary school, and the door by the superintendent's office.

"It helps keep with the ability to know who is coming and going into the school," Officer Bujalski said. "Limiting the doors can help us keep track of who is in the building and identifying people that shouldn't be in the school or haven't checked into the office."

The new safety team will meet at the end of each month to discuss new ideas and updates to the security protocols.

"It will give us a chance to build on our procedures and talk about things that are happening to keep improving on the safety at our school," Officer Bujalski said.

The school year was not even two weeks old before the recent school shooting on September 4 in Georgia.

At Apalachee High School, a shooter killed two teachers, two students and in-



Photo by Allison Toft

Art teacher Mr. David Houk and English teacher Mrs. Cathy Pearlman sit on safety buckets during a tornado drill. jured nine others. The community is grieving, but the shooter is in custody and being

charged with murder.

Prior to the Georgia shooting, this year has seen 29 mass killings in the U.S., and there were 42 last year, according to an article in the *Quad-City Times*.

"My goal as the SRO is to ensure that every staff member and student that comes into the building each day is safe and able to teach and learn," Officer Bujalski

New Iowa law sets guidelines for chronic absences

By Kila Wink

A new educational law establishes statewide attendance guidelines regarding chronic absences as families with students enrolled in Iowa schools are now being held to consistent standards to make sure students are present at school and in class.

Senate File 2435 was signed by Governor Kim Reynolds on May 9. Part of the law sets procedures for determining when a student is considered chronically absent. It also gives school districts a step-bystep plan for those students who are excessively absent.

Under the law, parents will be held accountable with repercussions at three points. The first is when students are absent for 10 percent of a grading period. A notification from the school district will be sent to the parent and the county attorney.

For Durant High School, this 10 percent threshold is reached after nine days in a semester grading period. After students are absent for 15 percent of a grading period, the school will hold an absentee prevention

program with the student and the parents, and the school will complete weekly checkins with the students. For Durant students, this step would occur after 13 absences.

Once a student is absent for 20 percent of the grading period, the county attorney may begin criminal action against the parents. For Durant students, this criminal action could happen after 18 absences.

If the county attorney proceeds with criminal action, a first offense will result in up to 10 days in jail and a fine of \$100 for the parents. A second offense could result in up to a \$500 fine and 20 days in jail, and a third offense could result in a maximum of 30 days jail time as well as a \$1,000 fine.

Cedar County Attorney Adam Blank said he had mixed feelings about the law.

"Some school district personnel from different districts have expressed to me that this seems kind of like a low threshold, but I do like the fact that it's universal from district to district," said Mr. Blank.

The county attorney, prior to Senate

File 2435, was part of the mediation process. Now, he'll only receive the case after the 20 percent threshold is reached.

"Taking me out of that step in the process, I think it remains to be seen whether that has a positive effect, a negative effect, or no effect," said Mr. Blank, who will still do some investigating on his own after receiving a case. The law does include exemptions for religious holidays and "legitimate" medical reasons but not for family vacations.

Junior Brooklyn Frantz is worried that she may run afoul of the law because in the past she has missed school for competitive dance.

"I am worried because I am involved in a competition out of school that requires me to go out of town and miss school here and there," said Frantz.

"Also, being out of town counts as an unexcused absence, so the families who take vacations throughout the year might struggle...they will lie, so it doesn't count against their kid."

Durant elementary students are held

to the same standards as the high schoolers, but their grading period is a shorter quarter, so missing only four days of school meets the 10 percent threshold.

"I've heard some concerns from different people involved in the schools, particularly the elementary schools, or schools that grade on a quarterly basis because essentially four absences amount to 10 percent of the hours of instruction for a quarter and at that point the school is sending out letters at four absences," said Mr. Blank.

Durant High School has also adopted two policies concerning what is considered an absence. Students who are more than six minutes tardy to a class will be considered absent, and students checked out of school for half of a period or longer will be considered absent for that period.

Frantz believes the new law may have negative effects for some students.

"Because there are students who are chronically absent for unnecessary reasons and due to this new law, they may start to struggle," said Frantz.

Middle school gym renovations set to begin

By Royce Richman

The construction for the new middle school gym is set to start next summer, but other improvement projects are already underway, according to Durant Superintendent Joe Burnett.

"We're hoping to break ground as soon as school gets out next spring," said Mr. Burnett about the new gym, which was approved in November of 2023 as a part of a bond referendum that will feature projects totaling more than \$13.2 million.

"We've had a steering committee that has been meeting and will continue to meet throughout early fall," he said. "Hoping to get the project dialed in in terms of the scope of what the final gym size is and the locker rooms and the electrical work that we need to get done."

The committee has to make sure that the new gym meets the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and that every small detail is checked over, according to Mr. Burnett. Once the plans are finalized, bids will be sent out for different construction companies to take on the job.

"The bids will go out around Christmas time, and then we'll get the bids back hopefully February-ish," he explained. "OPN, which is our architectural firm, is working on the bids right now."

The bond also includes making updates to the high school art and science rooms, along with a new sprinkler system and boiler system for the school building.

Plans will have to be made to move

different classes around the school while certain areas are being worked on.

"It's like renovating a house versus building a new one," said Mr. Burnett. "It's tough to live in a house that you're renovating, but you just have to figure it out."

The high school gym will have to be shared by students K-12 for gym class while the middle school gym is being renovated.

"We'd be wasting our time trying to figure out a schedule at this point because there's a lot of things still to be ironed out," Mr. Burnett said. "For about a 15-month window, we're just gonna have to be flexible."

He also said that the cost of the See BOND, page 3



Photo by Royce Richman
The new parking lot has 27 spaces for staff and parents to park.