

# Hays CISD eyes school safety after Uvalde

By Megan Rodriguez STAFF WRITER

Hays Consolidated Independent School District elementaries could see more law enforcement around campus this upcoming school year as the district, like many in San Antonio and beyond, looks to make campuses more secure following Uvalde's mass shooting.

The May 24 massacre at Robb Elementary School killed 19 students and two teachers. Although Hays CISD officials said many existing safety measures simply are continuing, there are a couple of changes sprouting up as a response to the tragedy.

"We're looking at some other options to try to think a little bit more creatively," said Jeri Skrocki, the district director of safety and security.

The district contracts with the Hays County Sheriff's Office to put officers at its six middle and four high schools, but there is none at the 15 elementary campuses. Skrocki said this is in part because most elementary students are under the age of 10 and cannot be charged with crimes. She also said staffing all 15 schools with their own officers would be a major challenge.

Even so, she said having law enforcement around can be a powerful deterrent to criminals, so increasing their presence on those elementary campuses has become a priority.

Skrocki said the district for a while now has encouraged officers to drop by the elementary schools whenever they want and use the free Wi-Fi in the parking lot if they need to file reports. But following the shooting in May, the district started pushing harder, and now it's trying to designate space at each elementary school to better welcome local law enforcement officers if they want to work from the schools to file reports.

Additionally, she said there are discussions about having officers patrol elementary schools.

Increasing the number of security cameras and traffic gates to various district campuses also has been on officials' radars for some time now, but Skrocki said the Uvalde shooting caused the district to ramp up those efforts.

Skrocki said pandemic-caused delays have slowed the district's ability to get the equipment that they want to install on campuses, but officials are looking to fill the need for those increased security measures as soon as they can.

Following the Uvalde tragedy, Gov. Greg Abbott charged the Texas Education Agency and the Texas School Safety Center with creating directives that could make campuses more secure. The directives the agencies lined up included requiring safety audits, scheduling safety drills and ensuring that campus officials are trained in safety procedures.

Skrocki said Hays CISD already was meeting all but one of the new requirements before the state made the announcement, and it's working to comply with the other one — doing a safety audit of exterior doors. Skrocki said the audit asks that all schools inspect each exterior door of their buildings and log information about them.

Harvest Coats, Hays CISD communication director, said the district also is reviewing its emergency operations plan. Skrocki said the plan is reviewed annually.

“Every day brings a new challenge,” Skrocki said, noting that the district always looks for ways to improve safety, from protecting kids from summer heat to preventing drug use. “Uvalde reminded all of us in the most horrific way that trying to manage all of those potential threats is super important.”

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