

## After Connecticut shootings, school officials taking hard look at safety measures

**By Jan Schultz**

***The Imperial Republican***

In light of the tragic shootings at the Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Conn., last Friday, in which 20 young students and six adults were killed, a natural question arises, “Could that happen here?”

Administration and school board members at Chase County Schools have not taken last Friday’s incident lightly.

Supt. Brad Schoeppe met Monday morning with Principals Mike Sorensen and Pat Lane, and Activities Director Troy Hauxwell about the security measures now in place at the school and other efforts that could improve the safety of students.

He’s also been in contact with school board members.

A letter to parents has been posted on the school’s website ([chasecountyschools.org](http://chasecountyschools.org)), encouraging them to limit their children’s access to media that is covering the issue so intently, and gives a full page of tips for talking to children about safety.

The letter also reminds them that all school visitors must sign in and out.

Schoeppe said he felt it was important not to wait until the next school board meeting in January to start discussions.

“We are evaluating a lot of things right now,” he said Tuesday morning.

“Unfortunately, we learn from every one of these incidents,” he said.

Schoeppe emphasized that schools are among the safest places to be for kids.

“I definitely feel CCS is a safe place. Safety is the No. 1 priority for our students,” he said.

The staff continually evaluates procedures and security at the school so the safest environment can be provided, he said.

“But, there are likely to be some changes,” he said.

Currently, safety measures in place at CCS include locked doors during the school day, required signing in and out by visitors, cameras and emergency plans.

But, Schoeppe said there are some additional measures that can be taken immediately, and after Monday’s meeting with fellow administrators, discussed at least four areas he said should be addressed, including:

1) Changing lock systems on the classroom doors—It’s believed the classroom doors have the original locks on them, which can only be locked from the outside. Having the lock inside the room will allow doors to be locked more quickly by teachers.

2) Shades over door windows—There is a small window on the classroom doors. Schoeppe said some schools have a shade system that can be quickly pulled over the window in emergencies so possible intruders cannot see in.

3) Student backpacks—In some schools, students are not allowed to carry backpacks during the school day and must leave them in their lockers. That likely will be considered here.

4) Large glass outside some classrooms—The kindergarten classrooms have large glass windows. Schoeppe indicated they may look at closing them in with drywall to cut down exposure.

“So many of these things we can do are inexpensive,” he said.

Schoeppey said he planned to get some cost estimates at least for the lock system changes before the board’s Jan. 8 meeting.

Sheila Stromberger, a school board member for 14 years, said school officials need to look closely at what CCS has in place now, and make sure those procedures are being followed by everyone.

She offered some additional security and safety measures the board and administration might consider, including an alarm system on all doors alerting staff when any of them are opened, propped open or didn’t latch tightly during the school day.

Another suggestion she gave would be a buzz-in system for visitors to the school.

“Granted, that didn’t help in Connecticut, but anytime you can slow them down, you are gaining valuable seconds of time,” she said. She does not believe having guns in the school by selected staff is the answer, nor does she feel they are ready for security guards.

Having served as one of four area superintendents in the Tulsa School District, Schoeppey said that district actually had its own police department and placed security guards in the schools.

He hopes that won’t have to be the case here, but he wouldn’t rule out having a designated person at the school with a weapon in locked storage for such emergencies.

The school officials emphasized that parents and patrons can feel confident of the school’s safety.

“More kids are killed in homes and in car accidents than schools,” Schoeppey said.

“With the millions and millions of kids going to school each day, schools are one of the safest places to be.”

But, people must also be realistic, they said.

Both Schoeppey and Stromberger said everyone needs to realize that if a person is intent on getting into a school with guns, he will.

“Our job it to slow them down to the best of our ability until law enforcement gets here,” Schoeppey said.

“This was a terrible tragedy,” Stromberger said, “but schools, for the most part, are safe and our kids need to know they are safe.”

But, events like last week’s are a “wake-up call,” Stromberger added.

“It makes you look at the procedures, what’s being followed and what isn’t and areas in which we are lax,” she said.

“It’s a reminder to tighten it up.”

## **Security measures now in place at Chase County Schools**

- Every door but the front entrance is locked from 8 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. The only way to enter the school building during those hours is the main entrance where people are required to sign in and out, and wear a badge while in the building noting they are a visitor.
- Cameras are in place at various entrances to the building, and activity can be monitored at all times. Tapes are also made of the activity filmed by the cameras.
- ALL classroom teachers have a Safety and Security Packet to be followed in case of

intruders, fires, tornadoes, bomb threats, chemical/toxic and medical emergency situations.