

December 2019

On Friday before Thanksgiving break, we had a first during my eight years as Superintendent. We placed school buildings on lockdown at the recommendation of the Guthrie Police Department. There have been numerous times where we have placed a school in a lockout condition but we have never reached a lockdown status until this recent situation.

In 28 years of work in the education field, I've never enjoyed an environment where the school district and the local law enforcement agencies maintained a better relationship than what we have established in Guthrie. Maintaining a safe atmosphere for effective instruction is the top goal each day. As a district, we have made a commitment few school districts have made with regard to safety. In addition to having four dedicated School Resource Officers, we employ off-duty officers during school hours at all other school sites. These officers are much more than simply a security guard. You will see them interacting with our students and staff as they become a part of our family. Some of them even have their own children in our schools. Protecting our students is much more than an "assignment" for our School Safety Team.

The events of November 22nd were very fluid at the time. Buildings were placed on lockout or lockdown based on the threat as the law enforcement agencies recommended. This decision was driven by the known location and risk of the potential threat. Decisions had to be made regarding transportation of students throughout the district since only half of our buildings with students were affected. This provides the difficult decision of holding our transportation district wide since that was the only realistic option. The concern about the safety of parents who were waiting to pick up their children at a school on lockdown was also considered. It is important to note that any school which is in a lockdown condition cannot allow anyone in or out of the building. Another factor making the situation more difficult was the Administration Building had also been placed on lockdown. This requires all staff in our building to leave their desks and go to a designated safe location in the building. Safety for students and staff will always be the first priority. Accurate communication will follow as soon as possible afterward.

The lockdown was lifted at approximately 3:00 p.m. and dismissal followed with some delays due to the need of avoiding the area closed by law enforcement. An automated call was initiated soon after the lockdown was lifted to all parents in the district about the event. One of the most challenging parts to using our automated calling system is the burden it places on our staff following the deployment of such a call. The system is designed to leave a voice message if the phone number being called can accept such a message. Instead of listening to the message, many parents simply call the number back which overwhelms our phone system. I watched our staff members take one call after another for over an hour from people who had received the call and called the number back.

The first day back from Thanksgiving break, a de-brief was held with our administrative team and the Guthrie Police Department so we could discuss what went well and what should be refined if a lockdown were to occur in the future. The meeting was productive and affirmed that established protocols were followed. Students and staff are to be applauded for their efforts in carrying out the procedures we have worked so hard to establish. Our children's safety will continue to be the top focus of our district every day.