

LTUSD tackling safety issues at school sites

By Kathryn Reed

Changing how a desk faces, putting a defensive item on a teacher's desk, playing over worst-case scenarios in one's head to know what to do just in case – those are some of the basic security measures being taken in Lake Tahoe Unified School District.

More substantive things are being done as well, and many are being implemented in coordination with local law enforcement.

LTUSD's school board was given an update on security within the district at the July 23 meeting.

Landscape modifications, window treatments, cameras, front entrance control, barriers to stop a vehicle from ramming a structure, signage – those are some of the easier items to tackle.

Another component to this is the technology needs of the district. The phone system is the same one Lake Tahoe Community College had that failed earlier this year and temporarily stopped voice communication. But the district's data delivery is even more antiquated, so that is a higher priority.

Al Frangione, who is leading the development of the security plan for the district, said the technology piece would cost \$1.5 million to do what he wants. There is about half of that dollar amount left from the Measure G facilities bond that could go toward IT.

Tuesday was about getting information, not for the board to make a decision on how to go forward.

What is happening

After the December 2012 fatal school shooting in Connecticut, a federal unfunded mandate came out saying the FBI needed to do some extensive training with local law enforcement to deal with school shootings or another crisis that would threaten students and staff.

Last week the El Dorado County Sheriff's Department used a West Slope school for a rigorous training.

LTUSD has been looking at how prepared it is in case there is a threat at a school.

"We looked at what are the threats and vulnerabilities and how do you rectify it," Frangione told the board.

What isn't public record is what all the weaknesses are so they cannot easily be exploited.

"The key thing is to get people to think about what they would do, especially by staff, so they can make a difference," FBI Agent Chris Champion said.

Staff will be receiving training before school starts next month and more intensive training will follow.

"It's probable staff is the first responders whether we like it or not," Frangione said.

A collaborative approach is being used, with multiple agencies involved in what is called REACT – Regional Emergency Action Crisis Team. But it was also noted that many of the groups don't regularly train together so each one might have a different set of protocols when it comes to dealing with an emergency.

With the South Shore being so small and staffing minimal, one department could not handle something like a Sandy Hook mass shooting.

Looking at prevention

Collaboration is also needed when it comes to various entities talking about what they perceive as a potential threat. It's not about profiling a student, or even an employee or parent, but instead putting pieces together.

The goal would be to try to get an individual help or defuse a situation before it became deadly.

Superintendent Jim Tarwater pointed out that in the last eight years he has found that parents are more difficult to reach.

El Dorado County sheriff's Lt. Pete Van Arnum spoke of how when he was with South Lake Tahoe Police Department in the 1990s he was the school resource officer at South Tahoe Middle School. It was at a time when gangs were infiltrating the school, and students and staff felt intimidated.

He said he's talked to teachers and that same feeling is coming back to STMS.

"Some kids are taking control again at the middle school," Van Arnum said. "It needs to be two pronged. You need to be tough, but you need to care."

He said building trust and relationships with students could help change how they behave. Programs like Police Activities League, after school boxing, weekend backpacking trips and a day on the slopes helped the kids bond with law enforcement and change the direction of their lives.

Today there is no officer at the middle school. And those programs are a thing of the past.