

Board Takes Action After Connecticut School Massacre

Written by Misty Green
Wednesday, January 2, 2013



“I know we’ve talked about hiring more School Resource Officers (SRO) for several years and can’t seem to find the money... but now it seems like we must do it to protect our children,” Macon County Board of Education Chairman Billy Wilmore stated during the December 27, 2012 special called emergency meeting.

The atmosphere during the meeting was one of solemn quietness, as the Connecticut Elementary School shooting massacre still weighed heavily on the minds of everyone.

The purpose for the special called meeting was solely to plan ways to make Macon County schools a safer place for children, and to strive to have it set up before students return from the holiday break.

Macon County Sheriff Mark Gammons, Lafayette Police Chief Stacey Gann, Red Boiling Springs Police Chief Terry Tuck, and Macon County School Resource Officer Sergeant Terry Atkins each addressed the board with their dedication to increasing police presence on school grounds, and doing their part to help out any way they can.

“Presently we have four schools that do not have an SRO officer,” Director of Schools Margaret Oldham stated, as she explained that currently one officer is making rounds to several different schools.

“It’s my thought that Westside is a priority for a SRO,” Sheriff Gammons commented, “because if something happened, the response time is greater being way out there.”

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“There is also a great need for a security fence at Westside,” board member Rebecca Tuttle said, because it is open territory and anyone could walk right up. “I know some gates need to be put in at Red Boiling Springs,” Principal Don Johnson commented.

There were many things about each school discussed by board members and the audience, which stemmed from a recent walk-through of each facility. Unlocked doors which students access throughout the day, portable buildings and the walkways back into school, and the possibility of installing a double locked entranceway at each school were among the list of areas to improve on.

A difference of opinion showed when a discussion of installing different classroom door locks came up. When the lockdown call is made during school, teachers currently have to go outside of their room and use a key to the outside door lock in order to secure their room. SRO Sergeant Atkins explained that this was done so that teachers could look out and grab any children passing in the hallways. The new locks would prevent teachers from having to go outside of their room to prevent an intruder, yet this change could affect unaware students on the outside of the classroom.

Sergeant Atkins also explained there is a color coded card system that is already in place, which teachers use during lockdown to alert help if there is a problem, including a way to tell if there are extra children accounted for in their room, or if children are missing.

After much discussion, the board approved a motion to hire two additional School Resource Officers to cover Westside Elementary and one to rotate Central Elementary, Lafayette Elementary, and Fairlane Elementary schools. Including the SRO's at Macon County Junior High, Red Boiling Springs School, and Macon County High School, this will add more security for Macon County students.

As far as money goes, this year's budget was not set up for this expense, however Director of Schools Margaret Oldham believes there can be some changes done within the budget to see that this need is fulfilled. Macon County Commissioner Tony Boles and City of Lafayette Mayor Richard Driver were present at the meeting, and also expressed their desire to help out Macon County Schools any way they can.

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