

Schools respond, take swift action

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Feb 8, 2019

The Montrose County School District and Montrose County Sheriff's Office jumped into action late Wednesday night after hearing allegations an Olathe High School student made a threatening comment involving the school.

The student, who was eventually sent to Grand Mesa Youth Services, will not only face legal consequences, but also consequences from the school district. MHS Vice Principal Jim Pavlich, who is set to become the MCSD director of safety and security in July, said MCSD takes these types of incidents seriously and gave praise to the student who spoke up about the incident. (Superintendent Stephen Schiell was not available for comment on Thursday, but provided a statement in a joint news release with the sheriff; see related story.)

Last year, two school shootings grabbed national headlines — one in Parkland, Florida, and the other in southern Maryland — and in turn helped highlight school safety locally. Montrose last year also saw a string of threats against area schools, receiving 17 such reports from December 2017 - March 2018, as previously reported. Olathe also had a couple threats as well.

Over the past year, MCSD has focused on creating a safer environments for students and adults in MCSD facilities. These safety upgrades include: all staff in having gone through ALICE Training; school cameras being connected to 911 dispatch; fencing; safer entryways; and door replacement.

Efforts are underway nationwide to prevent incidents like Wednesday's Pavlich said, adding there are many positive ways to encourage children to share how they are feeling and what they see.

"One of the neat things from last night is it was a Safe2Tell report," Pavlich said. "It came from our community, from our students who felt comfortable enough to voice concern that we then followed up on and were able to apprehend a suspect."

Safe2Tell is a statewide program managed by the Colorado Information Analysis Center which is located on the Front Range. This program allows students, staff and community members to anonymously report on people or situations they have safety and welfare concerns about with adults and local law enforcement.

The dispatch center will receive the reports and send them to WestCO Dispatch and district administrators and security team. There is a follow up reporting system for record keeping.

According to Pavlich, the Safe2Tell program is used often in MCSD schools. All of the schools are promoting the program and students have submitted a variety of reports throughout the week

from all school sites. These reports range from kids being concerned about another individual being depressed, to vaping and drug usage, all the way up to a threat to a school.

It is not just about concerns about someone attacking a school, Pavlich explained. It could be someone concerned that a child seems depressed but doesn't know how to help them. When this happens school officials follow up and get that student the appropriate support.

“The idea is to find out a kid or an individual needs help long before they ever think about committing an act of violence,” Pavlich said. “We want to find out when they're hurting and we (local law enforcement, MCSD, Center for Mental Health, Hilltop, PEER Kindness and other nonprofits) want to find them help.”

He noted that other states are modeling the Safe2Tell system. Pavlich said he is excited MCSD and Montrose Police Department, Montrose County Sheriff's Office and Olathe Police Department are integrated with Safe2Tell and have a system to follow up and investigate things such as threats.

Olathe High School Principal Scot Brown had high praise for Safe2Tell, which he has been using for 12 to 15 years. He emphasized that it allows for students to report anything they need to when it comes to safety and welfare. Plus, those who report through Safe2Tell are assured anonymity, reducing fears of retaliation, he added.

Many of such reports are handled through the school, but threats like the one alleged Wednesday are handled in coordination with local law enforcement.

If there is a bright spot in this incident, Pavlich said, it's that students used the reporting program the district has to share information that law enforcement and school officials were able to act on — and to promote safety.

For Brown, school and student safety is his No. 1 priority. The school threats last year were investigated thoroughly and dealt with appropriately, he said.

Pavlich said he has faith there will not be any false reports, with the understanding that this is not something to joke about. Legal and educational consequences will follow.

“I hope not,” Pavlich said, when asked if MCSD expects to have more of these incidents. “I hope that we grew quite a bit as a community last year and realized ... the way to process these nationwide events is not by joking about it.”

Last year after the Parkland shooting, a few students made poor choices on social media in the way they dealt and processed the event, Pavlich said. They were held accountable for their actions, he added.

The disciplinary process is based on board policy, Pavlich said. Specific discipline information is between the school/ district and that family. Board policies on violent/ aggressive behavior and/or the code of conduct can be found on the school district website; mcsd.org/.

“We take all threats to the school extremely seriously,” Brown said. “Any threat made to the school will be investigated very, very thoroughly until we get to the bottom of it. At the end if it, there will be consequences.”

With the anniversary of the Parkland shooting coming up, Pavlich said it’s a good time for families to discuss the seriousness of making threats to schools and the importance of students reporting concerns about other students or threats to the school to adults.

There are a number of ways students can report: speak to a school official; use Safe2Tell at [safe2tell.org](https://www.safe2tell.org), 877-542-7233, or the Safe2Tell app; or call 911. Pavlich emphasised that if youths have concerns, adults would like to hear them.

Brown would like to commend the student who came forward on the Safe2Tell line. He said it takes courage to report these things and sometimes these reports can save people’s lives. He encourages others to report things they hear, regardless whether they think what they hear is valid, to help keep the school safe.