

School Security and Safety at Clear Creek Amana
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The safety and security of students should always be a priority at school. Due to the tragic events at Perry High School on January 4th, 2024, a discussion of what procedures at CCA are taken to ensure the safety and security of students at CCAHS occurred.

ALICE Training

Teachers and students at CCA have participated in ALICE training for about three years now, but teachers have been doing the training well before that. The training teaches students and teachers strategies that increase the chances that staff and students will survive in case of an armed intruder. It is an option-based response strategy that is meant to enhance student situational awareness and be trained to handle dangerous intruders.

Ryan Paulson, the dean of students and appointed safety lead for the district, helps in numerous ways to ensure the safety and security of students at CCAHS. Paulson is one of the three ALICE trainers. They cover all 7 (soon to be 8) of the attendance centers in our area.

Perry High School was an ALICE school, meaning students and teachers were trained for the tragic circumstances that occurred. Paulson gives his thoughts on this situation, “The unfortunate event we had in Perry, they were an ALICE school... by all accounts, they implemented it accurately. While it was a tragedy, they credit their ALICE training for making the situation a lot better,” the effectiveness of these training programs is showing, we must continue to use them to ensure the safety of students.

School Safety

On top of CCA being an ALICE school, there are numerous things in place to ensure student safety at school. Since Paulson is the safety lead for our district, he does a lot of things behind the scenes and outside of school to ensure the safety of all the buildings.

Specifically, at CCA, he runs drills such as fire or tornado drills. He makes the pathways and determines who goes where in case of an emergency. Paulson frequently does building checks before and after school to monitor the building and to ensure it's safe.

Our school has a great security system that administrators monitor throughout the day. Paulson monitors the halls before and after school and throughout the day to ensure everything is up to code and safe for students. He also investigates possible threats or suspicious activity to guarantee students are secure within the building.

I sent out a form to students regarding their safety and security at school. A frequent concern students brought up was how the doors were unlocked in the morning and how they felt like anyone could get in. On top of CCAHS being a school building, it is also utilized as a community building. There are before and after school activities that students participate in as well as the athletics committee utilizing the building. Also, other people in the community can reserve the performance art center or gym to utilize those spaces. However, during the week from 8:20 to 3:30, the building is an instructional building. The

administrators always monitor who is entering and leaving the building to ensure student safety throughout the school day.

Although the school building is used as a community building, there are possible ways to enhance the safety of students. For example, the usage of student IDs to access the school building could be used as a way of identification and ensure that people are supposed to be there.

Kalli York, a freshman at Clear Creek Amana, participated in softball last year, and also thought that some sort of identification would be helpful, “They would always have the doors unlocked because we would have practices in the gym... There was nobody ever there to check who was entering or leaving the building. So having some sort of identification or someone there to check who was entering the building would increase safety.”

This concern was brought up to Paulson and he had his thoughts about the situation, “I would argue that although it could be used as a control, it would create a false sense of security and vigilance of students would lessen... I would rather err on the side that we keep vigilant and keep watch while tackling isolated incidents instead of giving students more access.” Although there is a general understanding of Paulson’s concerns, could the usage of student IDs increase school safety? CCAHS continues to improve and work on certain procedures to ensure student safety at school.

Although CCA offers a safe and secure environment for students, the utmost improvement of safety at school cannot happen unless gun laws are restricted, mental health is destigmatized, and a willingness to be educated occurs.

Restricting the usage or purchase of a gun does not mean getting rid of them. It simply means placing restrictions on who is allowed to purchase them, conducting background and mental welfare checks, and potentially lessening accessibility. Students should not have to worry about a potential armed intruder in their school or any place.

Freshman, Adam Wade, stated an opinion about gun laws, “School shootings could be avoided if gun laws were regulated,” even though it may not stop all school shootings, these are the steps to prevent them. No child should be afraid of their safety at school due to the possibility of an armed intruder. The school shooting at Perry High School cannot just be considered another statistic but a plea for action.

Student Security

Not only should a school prioritize student safety, but the security of students is just as important. Student security correlates to a student's emotional well-being and belonging. The hope is that all students have at least one safe person to talk to if they are upset. Whether that be another student or a teacher at school, it is important that everyone at least has someone they can rely on in difficult situations.

The counselors and teachers always try to create safe and inclusive environments for all students. There are many activities and clubs offered for students to participate in with the hope of increasing all students’ sense of belonging within the school.

Paulson discusses a general message CCAHS wants to portray, “We want to send the message that no matter who you are, where you come from, or what you represent, you have a place here. And that you’re here to learn so we want to make this a safe learning environment for you,” the hope is to create an inclusive and safe learning environment for all types of students. This way all subgroups of students are capable of having a proper education and a secure place to be.

To increase student security, bullying of all forms must be addressed, and students own identities, as well as identities they do not relate to, need to be represented in the curriculum we are taught. No student should feel like their identity is threatened or potentially in harm's way. By getting rid of hate and educating students about minority subgroups, general student security will increase.

A mutual understanding and respect must be established between students. This respect could increase all students' comfortability at school. Rose Piehl, a freshman from Clear Creek Amana High School states her opinion, “The best way to get rid of hate is to give understanding [because] people hate what they don’t understand,” this is a prime example of how inclusion and education about minority subgroups is necessary. Whether that be related to identities such as being a woman, person of color, queer, disabled, socioeconomic status, religion, or other historically oppressed groups of students, school should be a place where students feel safe and welcomed.

Unfortunately, students who fall into these minority groups are often more prone to bullying or harassment. Although it manifests in many forms, all forms should be taken seriously. Bullying ultimately results in the ostracization of a group of people who have no control over their perceived differences. There should be fair and consistently enforced policies to lessen the chance of bullying or harassment to occur. It is important to create safe spaces for students regardless of their differences to create a more open and inclusive school environment. Acts of bullying or harassment must be reported so that administrators are capable of monitoring the situation and taking appropriate action to ensure that it does not happen again.

Another way to increase student security is by destigmatizing mental health. Although it has become less foreign, treating it properly is important. There are safe spaces for students to utilize in case their emotional well-being gets in the way of their education. Activism and discussion of mental health are important in the process of destigmatizing it.

Paulson stated key components regarding student welfare, “...There is the mental health component and the hate piece ... Treating mental health appropriately and destigmatizing it and getting rid of the hate. You’re not gonna like everyone here, you're not gonna be friends with everybody here. But establishing mutual respect and realizing that we are all here for one goal,” The goal of education and to graduate after four years. It is not expected for students to be friends with everyone but rather create a mutual ground of respect for each other. By getting rid of hate, education within schools would flourish.

Clear Creek Amana High School displays multiple ways for students to feel safe and secure in school, although there continue to be opportunities for improvement. Creating a safe and inclusive space for students will allow for a better education. The programs and policies to ensure student safety are ultimately just as important. By establishing mutual respect and abolishing hate, the school will continue

to be a safe environment for students. School safety and security aren't solely related to a school environment, but they are both ultimately systematic problems that must be addressed.