East Central Independent School District

A tradition of quality education

December 3, 2018

Parents, staff and the East Central Community, I want to assure you that your children, our staff, and their safety is a top priority for the school board of trustees and myself. As I have said before, I never would have imagined the safety of our children could ever be at risk in any school. Sadly, these are very different times in our country. While we have always taken safety and security seriously and prepared ourselves to respond in emergency situations, in light of the active shooter events that have occurred at schools, churches, and venues over the last year, we believe it is our moral obligation to explore all options for "hardening" our campuses and facilities to protect students and staff from any potential threat. With guidance from the Texas School Safety Center, U. S. Homeland Security, U. S. Secret Service, and other security agencies, we have instituted safety and security best practices across the District. While it is uncomfortable for all, the conversation around arming qualified school staff members is occurring around the country. In an effort to be thorough, our school board is courageously exploring the option.

Over the course of the last year, the board of trustees has studied policy and procedure options for vetting, training, and arming qualified staff members. The decision has not and is not being taken lightly. Various groups of stakeholders surveyed over the last year were found to be largely in support. The District has been criticized for not better communicating with and surveying the entire community and that criticism has not been taken lightly either. In a strong effort to communicate with everyone this affects and be sure all viewpoints are heard and considered, we are taking the following actions; a Guardian Plan Frequently Asked Questions document has been created and is attached to this letter; I will be briefing and surveying faculty and staff across the District over the next few weeks; and there will be a panel discussion in early January with local and national experts who will be asked questions derived from a broad community survey.

Keeping our children and loved ones safe requires all of us working together. Knowing the topic we are exploring is a polarizing concept, I am asking all stakeholders to have patience with each other when you disagree and to do so respectfully. I would ask everyone to seek to understand differing points of view and find common ground when possible. We all want the same outcome, the safest possible environment for those we love and care about most. East Central is a strong community and I am certain that together we will make the best decision possible under the circumstances. Please be on the lookout for the community survey and detailed information about the panel discussion. As we go forward, please rest assured that every District employee is prepared to respond and is committed to keeping our children safe by any means necessary.

Sincerely,

Roland Toscano

6634 New Sulphur Springs Road • San Antonio, Texas 78263-2500 • 210/648-7861 • 210/648-0931 • www.ecisd.net
Fax: Curriculum 648-7046 • Personnel 477-7880 • Student Services 649-1729 • Business 648-4723 • Purchasing 648-0034 • Food Service 648-2547

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East Central ISD
Guardian Plan Consideration
Frequently Asked Questions

East Central Independent School District takes the safety and security of students and staff very seriously. In light of recent tragic events across the Nation, in Texas, and next door to us in Sutherland Springs, the school board began studying all options for protecting those entrusted to us daily. A significant number of safeguards have been put in place over the last two years. Now the possible adoption of board policy to allow appropriately vetted and trained staff members to carry firearms in a concealed manner, on district property is being considered. Below are frequently asked questions with answers to help stakeholders understand why the District would consider the Guardian Plan and how it could conceivably be carried out.

1. Why is ECISD considering adopting the Guardian Plan?

When considering a comprehensive emergency operations plan, it is in the best interest of everyone's safety to consider all options for immediate response in the gap between an attack and the arrival of police officers, regardless of the police response time. Many lives can be lost in a very short amount of time, seconds matter. Additionally, safety is everyone's responsibility. Some would argue people should have options to keep themselves and others safe to the extent they are comfortable in doing so. Those who are comfortable being armed, are trained, and regularly carry a firearm in places that allow it, should at least be considered as options to keep staff and students safe immediately during an attack.

2. Under the Guardian Plan, will staff members be required to carry a firearm?

No. Staff members will not be required to carry a firearm under the Guardian Plan. Participation will be voluntary and not all applicants may be accepted. Additionally, persons accepted to participate may be removed at any time.

3. What proactive measures are being taken by ECISD to ensure the safety of students and staff?

Students across the District are provided lessons on healthy social and emotional interactions. "EC Cares" trauma-informed practices have been put in place to identify students who have experienced trauma in their lifetime, to be sure they are provided the emotional support they need to be successful and feel connected to school. Safety monitors have been added to increase campus supervision. Access control has been implemented and upgraded around the District to include perimeter door controls, upgraded perimeter fencing, controlled access points, and strict visitor procedures. Monitored surveillance cameras have been implemented on campuses and district facilities. The NaviGate Prepared safety app has been implemented. The SafeSchools Alert reporting system is available allowing stakeholders to anonymously report issues. The A.L.I.C.E. Active Shooter and Stop The Bleed training have been provided to staff around the District. Additional police officers have been hired, and ECPD is armed and prepared to respond to any situation quickly, safely, and with more than adequate force.

4. Why is ECISD considering the Guardian Plan and not the Marshal Plan?

Both plans were considered. The Marshal Plan is largely governed by the State, while the Guardian Plan allows for local control. The school board prefers the option of being able to write the requirements, policies, and procedures for the plan to fit the safety needs and expectations of the ECISD community.

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5. How many Guardians will be approved and who will they be?

As many as are necessary to provide for the protection of staff and students. The identities of the Guardians will be kept confidential for their safety and to maintain the integrity of the plan. As part of our comprehensive emergency management plan, Guardian Plan specific details will not be made public.

6. What will the Guardian Plan cost and how will it be paid for?

The expense of the Guardian Plan would not be cost prohibitive and liability insurance cost would not increase. Initially, the expense would be shared between the Guardian volunteer and East Central ISD. Efforts would be ongoing to identify grant opportunities at the federal, state, and local levels to supplement funding.

7. What will the qualifications and requirements for Guardians include?

To be considered, volunteers would have to be employed by ECISD and in addition to the federal background check required for employment, have a valid handgun license issued by the state of Texas, pass a comprehensive psychological exam, successfully complete the initial training, agree to random drug and alcohol testing, surrender approved firearm for inspection, sign a nondisclosure agreement, and be approved by the school board. To continue as a Guardian, the volunteer would have to keep their handgun license current, pass a comprehensive psychological exam annually, submit to random drug and alcohol testing, successfully complete the monthly training requirements, surrender firearm for inspection monthly, and maintain anonymity.

8. What will the Guardian Plan training requirements include?

Training requirements would include but not be limited to physical safety and security, recognizing signs of mental illness, threat assessment, verbal de-escalation techniques, emergency response best practice, active shooter response, use of force, Stop The Bleed, implicit bias training for gun owners, and weapon retention, concealment, safety and proficiency training.

9. How will we ensure no Guardian will accidentally discharge a firearm?

Security measures would be put in place to prevent any accidental discharge of a firearm to include the use of smart gun technology. Guardians would be trained and required to adhere to a strict set of standard operating procedures for safe firearm carry, concealment, and retention. Currently, there is not a recorded case of an accidental discharge in a district with a Guardian Plan in place. As part of our comprehensive emergency management plan, Guardian Plan specific details will not be made public.

10. How many schools in Texas with a Guardian Plan have had a mass shooting?

According to research, there has not been a mass shooting in a school district where a Guardian Plan has been implemented.

11. What will be the role of the Guardian?

Guardians would be enacted as a part of the District's coordinated emergency response plan created in collaboration with local law enforcement and utilized only when all other safety measures have failed. Guardians are not police officers but would act in response to an active shooter. Their role would be to protect themselves, staff, and students from serious bodily injury or death until first responders arrive. As part of our comprehensive emergency management plan, Guardian Plan specific details will not be made public.

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