



SAM WILLOUGHBY | COMMUNITY EDITOR
Auburn City Schools Superintendent Karen DeLano briefs City Council on school safety measures on April 17, 2018, in Auburn Ala. (Video still)

Before the Auburn City Council's regular meeting Tuesday night, Auburn City Schools Superintendent Karen DeLano and Auburn Police Chief Paul Register updated the council on their efforts to secure Auburn's schools.

Conversation about school safety has heightened around the country in recent months after the Parkland, Florida, school shooting in February. In March, Auburn High School students walked out of class as part of a nationwide series of student protests against gun violence.

The school system and the Auburn Police Division have publically partnered together since the Parkland shooting to address school safety in the city, though DeLano and Register said the two have been working together for a while.

"The conversations about the security of the schools did not just begin when we've seen some of these latest tragedies," Register told the council. "We, for some time now, have been meeting prior to the school year, during the school year and at the end of the school year."

In March, ACS announced it had contracted with a private security firm, National School Safety and Security Services, to assess safety in the city's schools.

In addition to the private firm, Register said police have partnered with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security to do an assessment.

“Auburn High School is the first school in the state of Alabama to have the Department of Homeland Security come and do a physical assessment of the school,” the chief said.

DHS will return to Auburn to do a comprehensive review, Register said, and will provide police with feedback and virtual map tools to use in the school.

DeLano told the council the school system plans on implementing what the groups recommend after they complete their assessments.

Some Auburn High School parents have expressed concerns with the school’s architecture, which consists of large external shatterproof windows and floor-to-ceiling windows that serve as the interior walls of most classrooms.

Ward 3 Councilwoman Beth Witten asked the superintendent if the school system planned to address altering the high school’s windows if the safety assessments recommended it.

“I do think that there is that fear that they may come back with \$5 million worth,” DeLano said. “I’m a little concerned about budget, but we certainly are planning to take action on what they tell us. We’ll have to prioritize.”

Some Auburn’s schools, including Auburn Junior School, housed on Auburn High’s old campus, have an open plan, DeLano said. DeLano and ACS have consulted with architects to “tighten up” schools, she said.

“Every time we build a new building, the first thing we talk about with the architects is, ‘How do we make it more secure?’” DeLano said.

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A classroom at Auburn High School on Thursday, May 31, 2017 in Auburn, Ala.

abused.

Ward 8 Councilman Tommy Dawson, former Auburn police chief, has pushed for more officer presence in schools, and Register and DeLano said they will consider the measure after reviewing the safety assessments.

Currently, there is not a full-time officer in every school, but there are more officers in Auburn schools than ever before, according to the police chief. Going forward, Register said he would like patrol officers to be more present at the schools.

“Those areas that have a school in it, we’ve asked (patrol officers) to stop in, get out of the car, go in, speak with the faculty, do some walking around in the school there,” he said, noting the schools’ administrations would have notice ahead of time.

Some, like the American Civil Liberties Union, have criticized aggressive police presence in schools, claiming it leads to an increase in arrests of students of color and students who have disabilities for nonviolent crimes.

The Broward County Sheriff's Office came under fire for its response to the Parkland shooting after security footage showed a deputy standing outside the school while the gunman was inside shooting.

DeLano did not get into specifics on safety procedures in the schools in the public setting, saying she was worried about releasing details that could be

Register said the officers in Auburn’s schools work well with students and school staff and have asked to be there.

“We’re not taking a police officer and saying, ‘Hey, today you’re working in a school,’” the police chief said. “These are people that are highly trained, and first and foremost, they want to be at those schools.”

DeLano said the number of officers in schools is limited partially by the school system’s budget but said she thinks every school in town is adequately covered by police if there was an emergency.

Once DHS and National School Safety and Security Services complete their assessments, Register said the police division will update its staffing levels and procedures. In addition to the direct security measures, DeLano said the school system is also attempting to address mental health concerns and harassment prevention.

“You will notice that a lot of the incidents [school shootings] are caused by students,” DeLano said. “Making sure we know our kids and that our kids understand how to report is very important.”

The superintendent said the school system’s policy of random drug testing has potentially stopped some students from harming others. ACS is also partnered with the East Alabama Mental Health Center to provide students and families with its services.

On Tuesday, DeLano assured the council that ACS was working to improve not only safety but also the feeling of safety in schools.

Whether these measures are effective in not only addressing potential security issues but also relieving the fears of parents like Amanda Vaughan, [who told *The Plainsman* in February about her concerns about safety at Auburn High](#), remains to be seen.

“We’re never satisfied that we’re doing enough,” Register said. “We always intend to do more.”

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