



School Safe Gives Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools Fresh Angle on Security

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When Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools Superintendent Beverly Emory decided to encourage all of the system's 80-plus principals to perform a safety and security assessment of their buildings, the district didn't have to look hard to find a suitable tool.

Thanks to the efforts of Security Director Jonathan Wilson, the North Carolina school district already had used School Safe - JTIC's Security and Safety Assessment App for Schools.



In early 2017, Wilson selected School Safe, which is available free to criminal justice professionals and school administrators, for the system's school resource officers to store on their smartphones and use to assess their buildings' security features. When Emory, in the aftermath of the Feb. 14, 2018 shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Florida, asked the principals to complete and submit assessments, Wilson offered information on how to access School Safe.

Brent Campbell, Winston-Salem/Forsyth County's Chief Marketing and Communications Officer, says the superintendent already had a mandate in place for schools to find ways to improve safety without spending more money, and using a free tool like School Safe fit well with that mandate. In addition to recording assessment information for their own use, principals also submitted copies of completed assessments to the administration's security team.

"We encouraged them to use the assessment, because it helped principals see things they might otherwise have missed, and we used the results as a discussion point during leadership meetings," Campbell says. "The principals who had used it shared how it helped them and encouraged those that hadn't yet used it to give it a try."

One of the principals who used School Safe, Colin Tribby of Easton Elementary School, says completing an assessment using the app gave him several new things to think about: "I was pleasantly surprised to find out that it wasn't all about how to deal with an active shooter, and it brought questions to my mind that I hadn't considered. I hadn't thought about our parking lot signage or the location and number of handicapped and visitor spaces. It made us more aware of the bus drop-off and pick-up areas, and the need to have entrances and exits clearly marked. Also, after completing

the survey, we realized that outsiders could access a door we were leaving open, so we started locking it. Asking for the key is a minor inconvenience but people just have to get used to it.”

Easton, a pre-K through fifth grade school enrolling about 630 students, was built in 1957, and renovations are planned within the next several years. Tribby says that students and community members have worked on a number of beautification projects to try to keep things looking nice, and after completing the assessment, small tweaks will make the school safer as well. Grading for the addition of more parking spots is underway, for example, as are plans to change signage. Tribby cautions future users that a School Safe assessment isn’t something that can be done in five minutes; he says plan on taking at least 45 minutes to do a good job.

“I think it’s good that we now have data collected in an app,” he says. “We can do it over again next year and make sure we’re making improvements, or we could get rights to have another individual do it with fresh eyes. In fact, I know two other principals who walked each other’s campus, and each of them saw safety tweaks that the other missed.”

In addition to the two principals that Tribby mentioned, Wilson says several other pairs of schools also used the “buddy system” to flip-flop campus surveys. That approach goes along with the idea driving the use of School Safe for the assessments: the district wanted principals to find a new way of looking at their campuses.

“Principals walk through their schools 100 times a day and they miss things because they see them all the time. We wanted to find a tool that would force them to look at things a little differently,” Wilson says. “We had paper documents before and this is much more in line with the times. They can use School Safe to make notes, and they can save it and come back to finish later if they run out of time.”

Principals won’t be able to address every issue they see after performing the assessment, but it might make them think about changing their car dropoff to a different point, or installing something like bollards or big flowerpots to block an open sidewalk that might allow an intruder to drive right up to the door.

“Sometimes it isn’t a physical change that a school needs, but rather a change in the way they do business, such as locking additional doors,” Wilson says. “The district issues them all smartphones, and using the app just gave them a simple way to walk around the school and look at things. They could make notes, put the phones in their

pockets and walk on to the next spot.”

For more information on Winston-Salem/Forsyth County’s use of School Safe, contact Brent Campbell at bcampbell@wsfcs.k12.nc.us. For information on how to obtain access to School Safe, visit <https://justnet.org/SchoolSafe/index.html>. The app is available in both iOS and Android versions, along with a new desktop-friendly version (see related article, “[JTIC Releases Desktop Version of School Safe](#)”).

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