

School

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"This is an old school," she pointed out. "It was built long before (a potential school shooting) was a concern. We have short- and long-term goals regarding safety at the school. It's ongoing, and I think it will continue to be ongoing. We're going to have to be constantly upgrading our systems to keep up with security."

Talk of securing schools has led some critics to state that schools are starting to look more like prisons and less like places of learning for kids. Attlesperger says the beauty of Humbolt is its design. "The nice thing about the way our school is set up is that if the outer campus is secure, the kids can move freely throughout the rest of the campus. The playground is in the middle of the school. The way we're configured, we can still have a very secure perimeter and move about freely."

School shootings are a concern everywhere, according to Attlesperger. "I spent some time in Central Pennsylvania and there was an Amish school shooting. Somebody passing through, and you think that something like that could never happen. They don't believe in locking doors, they don't have fences around their schools. It just takes one person drifting by."

Attlesperger said she is in favor of teachers being armed but not with any type of lethal force. "Accidents happen," she said. Tasers and other non-lethal weapons would be acceptable, but Attlesperger said she doesn't want to introduce the option of lethal force to an elementary school.

Another concern for Attlesperger is the amount of things schoolteachers are already responsible for that go beyond their normal teaching duties.

"What we ask of teachers already is draining. It takes every ounce of their being to be the best that they can be all day, every day for our kids. To put that on them I would never ask. Which is why we would like an SRO. They're trained for that. Their primary job function is safety and security. That is not a teacher's primary job function," she said.

"It's been a difficult couple years with COVID, and I would never ask them to do anything more. Teachers don't clock out at 5 o'clock. When they aren't working with the kids they are planning for working with the kids, and the kids are always on their minds. It is a 24-hour, seven-day-a-week job."

Grant School District Superintendent

dent Bret Uptmor said anytime there is an incident like Uvalde, school administrators across the nation are on "high alert."

"We don't know how this will transpire," he said. "This happened so close to the end of our school year. A lot of our kids were focused on end-of-the-year studies, sports and things like that. For administrators, it means your eyes are going everywhere. One, to make sure that kids are doing what they need to do to finish the year out, as well as to make sure there is good safety in the buildings. That is always our top concern. Are we doing everything we possibly we can to make sure when kids come to school they are going to have assurances that it is a safe environment for them?"

Uptmor said the district is already in talks with the Sheriff's Office to have a resource officer and it is just a matter of completing that process.

"The school board is on board," he said. "They want to have somebody representing our law enforcement so that sense of safety and security is present. I believe that next year you'll see something in our schools. We wish we could've gotten it done this year, but it wasn't in the cards."

Uptmor is confident local law enforcement would come to the aid of schools if needed.

"Am I comfortable that we will have good representation? Yes. My concern always is, can they be there fast and be present in a short amount of time at any of our schools?"

Uptmor declined to comment on the question of arming teachers with lethal or non-lethal force as a deterrent to school shootings, saying only that the school board discussed the issue in 2018.

Uptmor said security measures are in place in the district, but it's impossible to plan for every possible scenario.

"What I worry the most about is we don't know what other ways things could happen. That is always what worries me. What we don't know could happen," he said.

"I'll just add that I'm always very impressed by our teachers, our staff, our board and our school administration, as well as right here in our own district office. We always have the safety of students in mind. We may not always end up with the same resolve when we talk about how to do things, but we come together as a team and we make it a safe place for our kids. I think as a county we do that, too, as superintendents. We're always talking and making sure we support each other. That's a really important trait to have in a county this size," Uptmor said.

Police

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from an active shooter in a school or something else.

"I'm the one that's expected to stop them and lay my life on the line so that no one else gets injured," McKinley said. "This is what I'm doing. This is dangerous, this is scary, but that's what I'm here for."

McKinley said what happened at Robb Elementary School stepped up the sense of urgency to ensure that local law enforcement officers are prepared to handle a similar scenario.

He said the Sheriff's Office would be bringing in trainers from the state's Department of Public Safety Standards and Training for an active shooter training with students and teachers at a school within the county that requested the training.

McKinley said other first responders from agencies in the school's district would also take part.

The Sheriff's Office plans to have a school resource officer stationed at Grant County schools this fall, which McKinley believes will be a deterrent to a potential shooter.

McKinley said the officer will be someone the kids can build a strong rapport with and feel comfortable enough to go to for help instead of someone who is there to catch them committing a crime.

"I don't like it when people see us and say, 'I want you to scare my kid,'" McKinley said. "We're not there to scare your kid. We're here to help your kid."

The "scared straight" approach, he said, is the wrong kind of policing.

"I want them to respect us," he said, "and see us as somebody they can come to."

Coordinated response

The Oregon State Police has a special weapons and tactics team with members scattered across the state that would respond with tactical assistance to Grant County law enforcement agencies in an active shooter incident. According to the OSP web page, the SWAT team has 24 tactical members, 12 crisis negotiators and two medics.

Capt. Stephanie Bigman, OSP's media and public relations representative, said in an email that she preferred not to give out specific locations and numbers of SWAT team members.

Bigman said each case is evaluated based on the circumstances. Still, she said, generally a local jurisdiction would request SWAT team assistance through the chain of command and the SWAT commander, in conjunction with OSP Operations, would determine if OSP SWAT is needed.

"Usually," she said, "we can have the officer in charge on the phone with a SWAT commander within a few minutes."

As for state troopers, Bigman added, during an active shooter event, OSP troopers are trained to respond immediately to the threat (as opposed to assembling a tactical team to enter a school building with a shooter inside).

The reality, McKinley said, is that it could take a significant amount of time before the state's SWAT team members arrive to provide backup. Local law enforcement — the short-staffed Grant County Sheriff's Office and state troopers patrolling in the area — will be the first responders to arrive in shooter situations.

That's all the more reason local law enforcement needs to continue to receive SWAT training and have the equipment, such as protective shields, to respond in an emergency, McKinley added.

"We need our local people to be able to be the ones that make a difference instead of waiting hours for that kind of response," the sheriff said. "If you've got something going on in a school, we need to be the ones that deal with it."

First line of defense

During the Wednesday, June 1, session of County Court, McKinley said he knows that things are a little different in Grant County. However, he said, after watching what happened in the Uvalde shooting and talking to school officials from around the county, he has huge concerns for the

safety of local schools.

That concern, he said, brings up the staffing shortage at the Sheriff's Office.

Since the John Day Police Department was shut down in October, enforcing the law within the city limits has fallen primarily to the Grant County Sheriff's Office, which has just four patrol deputies covering the entire county. McKinley has repeatedly told both the John Day City Council and the County Court that he needs additional deputies to provide adequate coverage.

The John Day City Council offered to pay the county \$300,000 a year to hire three deputies to provide law enforcement services in the city limits. But that proposal also called on the county to give the city \$300,000 a year from its road fund to pay for street improvements to serve new housing developments in John Day, on the theory that housing starts in the city would broaden the tax base for the entire county.

While the County Court never formally deliberated on the city's proposal, court members have made it clear that the idea of linking county road fund money to police services is a nonstarter.

The city and county still have not come to an agreement on law enforcement funding. Nonetheless, Grant County's draft budget included a \$300,000 contribution from John Day.

One way or the other, McKinley said, the Sheriff's Office needs more staff.

"It's not like we're asking for the moon," McKinley said. "There just needs to be a few more people that stand between evil and the innocent."

Sawmill

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said loggers under contract to harvest Douglas fir

trees would no longer have to haul the logs to Elgin or Pilot Rock for milling. With the rising cost of fuel, he said, selling those logs to Prairie Wood would be

a better option all around.

"We will fill that void," Westbrooks said in her email. She said local loggers and landowners can contact the company to learn more.

Prairie Wood also hopes to collaborate with the Malheur National Forest and other public agencies on "important" forest res-

toration projects.

Currently, Trulock said, Prairie Wood does not have a contract with the Forest Service, but the mill's mothballed cogeneration plant could provide a market for biomass coming off the forest.

The biomass, which is essentially small logs, branches and bushes

that would otherwise get burned up in the forest or left on the ground, could be ground and burned in the cogeneration plant to generate heat and electricity, Trulock said.

Prairie Wood plans to restart the co-gen facility after it obtains the proper permits.

Jim Hamsher, Prairie City's mayor, told the newspaper that after he posted the Prairie Wood Products press release on his personal Facebook page he received upwards of 10 phone calls for more information about the mill and how to get hired.

The Prairie City mill was purchased by the D.R. Johnson Lumber Co. in 1976. Two years later, the family-owned company added a stud mill and planer. Then, in the late 1980s, the company installed a co-generation power plant.

The sawmill, which operated successfully in

Prairie City for more than 30 years and employed upwards of 100 people who worked two different shifts, shuttered in 2008 amid a housing market crash that led to a lack of available sawlogs.

D.R. Johnson restarted the mill in early 2009 but shut it down permanently by the end of the year. The cleanup of the mill, which sits at the west end of Prairie City, concluded in 2019.

Since then, much of the mill equipment has remained, along with the co-gen plant.

In Friday's email, Westbrooks added that the company had been hoping to reopen the mill for years as the family had always wanted to return to Grant County.

"We are excited to be back and bring much-needed jobs back to the area," she said, "reduce wildfire risk and promote forest health."

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