

# Enhancing Safety and Security at Sparta Area Schools

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As the school year comes to a close, Sparta Area Schools reflects on the significant strides over the past year in enhancing safety and security for their students and staff. At the forefront of these efforts is Josh Fellows, the district's Lead Safety Manager. Fellows brings a wealth of experience and dedication to his role, aiming to create a secure and welcoming environment for all.

## **Building Trust with Students and Staff**

One of Fellows' primary goals is to foster strong relationships with students and staff. He believes that a proactive approach to safety involves being present and approachable, making it easier for students to share their concerns.

"Interacting with the kids is the best deterrent [to adverse behavior] we could possibly have," says Fellows. "I truly believe that's the best way to prevent something—to give those kids that ability and comfort to talk and get to know us. Trust needs to be established before they can share their concerns with us."

To build this trust, Fellows spends a significant amount of time engaging with students in informal settings, such as during lunch breaks or school events. He makes it a point to be visible and accessible, breaking down barriers that might otherwise prevent students from seeking help. This approach not only deters potential issues but also creates a sense of community and safety within the school.

Fellows' focus on relationship building extends beyond just the students. He acknowledges the importance of also connecting with parents and staff. "I've gotten to know quite a few families this school year. There are a lot of good conversations that happen even out of disciplinary events for the kids. There's a lot of positivity that comes from meeting with parents because it gives me a chance to interact with them and show them that 'Hey, I see both you and your student—and I do care'".

## **Strengthening School Security Measures**

Fellows' position at Sparta Area Schools combines security and administrative responsibilities, allowing him to work closely with Deputy Antonio Costa, the district's full-time School Resource Officer (SRO). This partnership ensures comprehensive coverage across the district, providing quicker response times and a broader security presence.

"My position is unique in that it works in conjunction with the SRO because we can balance responsibilities in a manner that avoids escalation," explains Fellows. "I can handle the administrator responsibilities and bring in Deputy Costa if need be. Day to day we're able to divide attention and be present in multiple locations. We really work together very well".

This collaborative approach allows for better handling of potential threats and incidents. While the SRO manages law enforcement aspects, Josh's role ensures that administrative searches and minor incidents are addressed promptly, reducing the risk of escalation. This dual-layered security system enhances the overall safety net for the students and staff.

### **Managing Challenges with Patience and Understanding**

Fellows' experience in law enforcement has equipped him with valuable skills in conflict resolution and patience. He emphasizes the importance of understanding the broader context of any incident and maintaining a calm demeanor, even in stressful situations.

"Developing a sense of patience and practicing it in difficult scenarios has been crucial," Fellows notes. "At the end of the day, we're all still people. If someone is screaming at you and having a really bad day, being patient with them is critical to settling a scene while allowing them to be heard".

In practice, this means that Fellows approaches each situation with a mindset of de-escalation. Whether it's a conflict between students or a heated conversation with a concerned parent, his ability to remain calm and composed helps to diffuse tensions and find amicable solutions. This approach not only resolves immediate issues but also builds a foundation of trust and respect—two aspects Sparta thrives to instill in all our Spartans.

### **Committing to Continuous Improvement**

Reflecting on his first year at Sparta Area Schools, Fellows acknowledges that safety and security are constant learning processes. He is dedicated to adapting to the evolving needs of the students and staff, ensuring that their safety remains his paramount.

"Their safety is my highest priority. That is my number one goal in this entire district is the safety of these kids," he affirms. "I believe in it enough that I've dedicated my career to it."

Fellows' proactive and approachable style not only enhances safety but also promotes a sense of trust and security among students and parents alike. He continuously seeks feedback and collaborates with teachers and staff to identify potential areas for improvement. Whether it's updating safety protocols or attending additional training sessions, Fellows remains committed to ensuring that Sparta Area Schools are as safe as possible. The next time you see Mr. Fellows in the hallways or at an event, be sure to say thanks!