

# Altoona Mirror

## School districts to use safety hotline

Helpline to allow students to report bullying, harassment, other concerns

CLAYSBURG — Four area school districts have agreed to enter a contract to give students access to a confidential hotline to report bullying, harassment and other safety concerns.



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Beginning March 1, the Safe School Helpline will be available to students in the Altoona Area, Claysburg-Kimmel, Hollidaysburg Area and Tyrone Area school districts.

*“It provides a communication avenue for students if they hear something or if people in the community hear something. It’s an anonymous communication that could be a tip line for us, and*

*hopefully it's a way to protect our kids,"* said Darren McLaurin, superintendent of Claysburg-Kimmel, at a meeting Wednesday.

The Claysburg-Kimmel and Hollidaysburg boards approved the agreement with the Safe School Helpline the same day a former Florida student allegedly killed 17 people on a shooting rampage at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Florida. Prior to the Claysburg meeting, board members held a moment of silence to honor those killed in the shooting.

According to a press release by Altoona Area School District, the Safe School Helpline offers students 24/7 access and a confidential and anonymous means to report threats to the health and safety of students.

Reports can be made by phone, text or mobile app.

*"The Safe School Helpline was recently introduced at the Blair County superintendents' meeting as an opportunity to provide a resource countywide for students to help ensure their safety, both individually and collectively as a school district,"* the AASD press release stated.

The Safe School Helpline service was founded in 1993 and is offered at more than 6,000 schools nationwide in more than 20 states.

*"This is another tool to hopefully save a child's life,"* Hollidaysburg Area Superintendent Bob Gildea said.

School officials stressed that if a student is suicidal or is in an immediate crisis, the hotline transfers the call to the local 911 center. If the caller doesn't have an immediate need, the hotline informs the school district of the students' call the next day.

*“Since 1997, there have been numerous shootings in U.S. schools. The vast majority of perpetrators verbalized their threat before the incident. If we can capture that information before an event occurs and work with law enforcement, we hope that we could prevent future incidents,”* according to a quote on the Safe School Helpline website from William F. Downey, retired special agent for the FBI.

Mirror Staff Writer Shen Wu Tan is at 946-7457. Mirror Staff Writer Russ O’Reilly contributed to this report.