



Blair County schools to get hotline for parents, students to report safety concerns

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BLAIR COUNTY, Pa. - Students and parents in the Altoona, Hollidaysburg, Claysburg-Kimmel and Tyrone area school districts will soon have access to the Safe School Helpline.

The helpline is completely anonymous, and someone will take your call 24/7.

"Yeah, I think that's the problem. They're afraid to say anything because they're afraid of getting into trouble...I think they wouldn't have to worry," Hollidaysburg resident Arla Bratton said.

Anyone can report concerns of bullying, harassment, safety, drug activity or other crimes. Students and Parent can call, text or reach out through a cellphone app.

"If something doesn't feel right to a student or to a parent -- this gives them an avenue that they can reach out right away," Altoona Area School District Asst. Superintendent Patty Burlingame said.

The school then gets notified and an investigation can begin.

"I don't think we can ever have enough resources for children to keep them safe," Burlingame said.

This tool is something parents and residents hope can prevent another school tragedy.

"You don't know the day when you drop your child off at school is that going to be the last day that you're ever going to see them? It's heart-wrenching. It's terrifying as a parent," Hollidaysburg parent Jennifer Smilnak said.

The hotline will be open starting March 1.

Hollidaysburg Area School District Superintendent Robert Gildea headed the effort.

The Safe School Hotline number is: 800-418-6423 ext. 359. For text message tips, type the word TIPS to 66746. The app is free on Apple and Android devices.

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