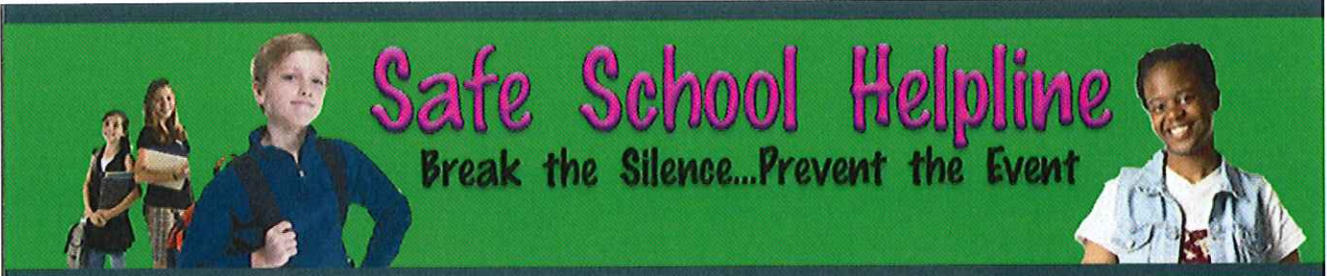


Blair County schools provide student tipline

by Katie O'Toole

Thursday, February 15th 2018



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School name:

Several Blair County school districts, including Altoona Area School District, Hollidaysburg Area School District, Claysburg-Kimmel School District and Tyrone Area School District, have adopted a new tipline system for students.

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CLAYSBURG -- Several Blair County school districts, including Altoona Area School District, Hollidaysburg Area School District, Claysburg-Kimmel School District and Tyrone Area School District, have adopted a new tipline system for students.

It allows students to anonymously notify school administrators of any threats or concerns they might have about any issue, including a possible attack, according to a release from Altoona Area School District.

Claysburg-Kimmel superintendent Darren McLaurin said Thursday that the districts have been discussing The Safe School Helpline for about a month, but the school board voted to officially implement the system just hours after a mass shooting at a Florida high school Wednesday.

McLaurin called the coincidence "tragic timing."

"It's concerning to me, with 30 years experience in education, that we're seeing these terrible things across the country," he said, adding, "We need to look into what's causing these types of issues and see what we can do as a school and as a community to help eliminate these things."

That need for answers is the common ground this week for students, parents, lawmakers and school leaders.

McLaurin said that solutions are not simple, but better communication with students might help prevent Blair County from being the next community on the list of American mass shootings.

Students who survived the attack in Florida have said they "weren't surprised" to learn the person charged with the shooting was 19 year old Nikolas Cruz.

Neighbors and former classmates have described Cruz as "aggressive, psycho and violent."

Law enforcement officials called his social media presence "very disturbing," saying at a press conference that Cruz said on Youtube that he would be "a professional school shooter."

NBC News reports that his former classmates joked about him "shooting up" the school one day.

The Safe School Helpline provides students an outlet to share information that might help law enforcement prevent a similar attack or prevent suicide, according to a release. McLaurin said that the helpline also provides access to a live mental health professional.

McLaurin said that to prevent this type of tragedy, communication is "the most important thing."

"Communicate with adults. If you have a concern, tell someone and the Safe School Helpline provides multiple opportunities to do it through phone, text or the app. If you have that gut feeling if you have a concern, tell someone and we (school administration) will contact the proper authorities," he said, adding that in the event of immediate threat, the helpline will call 911.

He said that the schools will begin to train students and use the helpline March 1.