AUGUSTA COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS
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Information for the Community Regarding Weapons Detectors in Schools
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General Information

The Augusta County School Board voted to approve a plan to purchase and utilize weapon detectors in our schools. In the coming months, Augusta County Public Schools (ACPS) will implement training for staff in the use of a weapons detection system to screen students and visitors. The detection system will enhance current security measures that are already in place. ACPS is always evaluating our safety procedures and layers of security. The detectors will be a further deterrent and an added protection for our students and staff.

Augusta County Sheriff Donald Smith and his law enforcement team, in conjunction with the ACPS School Safety Committee, have expressed interest in additional layers that may be added to help protect our students and staff. Sheriff Smith and his team along with School Board members, Superintendent Bond, and other ACPS Central Office staff were very impressed with the presentation of the weapon detectors that will allow efficient entry into a school building or school event while also thoroughly scanning for an instrument or object that could potentially inflict harm to multiple individuals. The benefits of this particular system include:

- ★ fast and automatic screening
- ★ no removal of backpacks, purses, phones, and bags
- ★ extreme transit flow with near-zero nuisance alarms
- ★ quick to set up and install – units weigh only 25 lbs. with less than one minute of setup time
- ★ indoor and outdoor operations

The weapon detectors are a walk-through detection system, composed of two freestanding mobile pillars. They can be used at a variety of entrances or security checkpoint locations, including sporting events, graduations, or school dances.

This same system is being used in venues around our country, including airports, public events, schools, hospitals, theme parks, stadiums, performing arts centers, government buildings, NFL stadiums, and local universities that ACPS already utilizes for our graduation ceremonies.

Students and visitors will not have to remove things such as keys, phones, lunch boxes, or water containers from their backpacks or pockets when walking through the detectors. Student Chromebooks, other types of laptops, and large notebooks will need to be carried and passed to staff as students move through the detectors. The metal spine of Chromebooks, laptops, and large notebooks will cause the detector to alert because the shape and density of the metal spine are similar to a potential weapon. Since these items will not go through the detectors and will not be searched individually in order to ensure efficient entry into the building when the detectors are in use, students will no longer be allowed to carry zip-up binders/notebooks that could conceal a weapon.

The weapon detection systems will be in place in some of the division's middle and high schools at the beginning of the 2023-24 school year. Staff will be trained on the detectors before the actual implementation. Units will be placed in the schools with an organized schedule or as needed if a situation deems necessary.

ACPS fully understands that the first couple of days of implementation will require time to evaluate and potentially revise the procedures and protocols used in the training of staff. Time will allow the students and visitors to understand the process, as administrators and staff work through any needed changes. We want to maintain a welcoming environment while also providing proactive safety measures for everyone involved. We ask for everyone's patience during the initial implementation of this additional safety measure. We anticipate efficient processes and entrance into our schools where detectors are in use after the first several days of implementation.

Keeping schools safe without creating an unnatural experience for students, visitors, or teachers is our main priority. We will still utilize a bus drop off and parent drop off entrance routine in each school as we have provided in the past.

ACPS strives to foster a school climate where everyone takes school safety seriously and where discipline and consequences are sufficiently imposed when the safety of students and staff is compromised. Of equal importance is the proactive social-emotional and mental health support that is offered to students and staff.

Students and staff have a fundamental right to feel and be safe in our schools. Proactive weapon detectors are helping to keep schools safe allowing school divisions to bring the focus back to education. ACPS strives to place learning, development, and the well-being of children at the forefront of each school day.

Unfortunately, tragic events are occurring at colleges, secondary and primary schools, and public events throughout our nation including in the state of Virginia. ACPS, in conjunction with the Augusta County Sheriff's Office, wants to add another layer of security that has been fully vetted, maintains a quality reputation of accuracy, and minimizes disruption within our schools. We will continue to take the steps necessary to protect students, staff, and members of our school community.

<u>Operation and Procedures</u>
A dedicated security team takes on the responsibility of greeting staff and students and handling detected threats.

Entrance Example #1: A student arrives at school without any harmful instrument or objects that will cause an alert and they walk through the front doors of the school, walk through the detection system, and continue to their normal starting location for the school day.

Entrance Example #2: A student arrives at school with an instrument or object that resembles a weapon; or is concealing an actual weapon. They will walk through the front doors of the school, walk through the detection system, and the system will then alert with both a low-volume alarm and a visible red light, notifying staff of the potential threat. The student will be guided through the secondary screening protocol that involves a search of the student and their belongings. A hand-held metal detector may be used and additional assistance may be provided by the School Resource Officer.

FAQs

How does the detection system work? The system utilizes two towers that students and staff walk through at a natural pace. If the towers turn green, no threat has been detected and the individual passes through without stopping. A staff member will assist in monitoring the screening to instantly identify if a potential threat has been detected. If the system identifies a potential threat, the tower will alert with a red light and sound. That individual can then undergo secondary screening.

What happens if the alarm on the system sounds? Staff will manage the detection system by utilizing their training in the system's implementation protocols. In most cases, the individual who sets the alarm off will go to a secondary screening location where the security team will check out the backpack and other belongings. A hand-held metal detector may be used and additional assistance may be provided by the School Resource Officer.

Why are zip-up binders no longer allowed? The metal spine of Chromebooks, laptops, and large notebooks will cause the detector to alert because the shape and density of the metal spine are similar to a potential weapon. Since these items will not go through the detectors and will not be searched individually in order to ensure efficient entry into the building when the detectors are in use, students will no longer be allowed to carry zip-up binders/notebooks that could conceal a weapon.

Which ACPS schools will have the detectors? The weapon detection systems will be in place in some of the division's middle and high schools at the beginning of the 2023-24 school year. Staff will be trained on the detectors before the actual implementation. Units will be placed in the schools with an organized schedule or as needed if a situation deems necessary. When funding allows, systems will be placed in other schools.

Will the detection system pick up knives? Yes, knives are included in the list of potential weapons the system is capable of detecting.

Will the detection system pick up vapes? Yes, the system is capable of detecting vapes and similar devices.

Is the detection system safe for people with an implanted or wearable medical device? In keeping with FDA guidance on Electronic Article Surveillance (EAS) and walk-through metal detectors, it is recommended that visitors and system

operators with implantable or wearable medical devices consult their device manufacturer or physician for information relating to their own specific device. An alternative screening approach is recommended for anyone who has safety concerns.

Are these systems safe for long-term exposure, i.e. for children walking through daily or personnel staffing the system? The detection system uses extremely low-frequency radio waves (ELF) - a non-ionizing sensing modality - in compliance with the Institute of Electrical & Electronics Engineer's (IEEE) 2019 guidance for safe operation with the general public, which applies to regular/occupational as well as infrequent exposure.

Is facial recognition utilized in the detection system? The technology does not use facial recognition. The system evaluates the items passing through it and, depending on the setting, will determine the possibility of an instrument or object that could potentially inflict harm to multiple individuals.

How will they be monitored? System settings will be monitored and changed by administrators through an app that allows the sensitivity of the detection system to be changed based on the objective of the screening. For example, the sensitivity can be set to detect a piece of metal as small as a paper clip.