

Brockton High gets security upgrades in months since shooting

High school introduces more than dozen new security procedures since incident

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BROCKTON —

In the three months since a nonfatal shooting occurred on the grounds of Brockton High School, more than a dozen changes have been made to boost security at the school, officials said.

And plenty more changes are planned, including replacing problematic exterior doors and installing more security cameras.

“It was a wake-up call to everybody – to me, to the kids, to the faculty,” Brockton High Principal Susan Szachowicz said of the Dec. 2 shooting.

The incident took place after school hours outside the gym, and left a 17-year-old former student with gunshot wounds on both legs.

In the weeks that followed, Superintendent Matthew Malone hired a consultant to do a thorough review of school security. Meanwhile, school faculty and administrators did their own inventory of possible security upgrades, Szachowicz said.

The result was a report, presented to the School Committee on Tuesday, that lays out a series of immediate and longer-term changes to boost safety and security at the high school.

Among the 16 changes already enacted:

Faulty exterior lighting fixtures were repaired or replaced.

School police were relocated to the first floor of the Red Building, to improve surveillance of those entering and leaving the campus and to put the security force closer to the gym.

School police are now under the command of a city police captain, and the school hired two after-school security guards.

All exterior doors are now numbered and marked on both the inside and outside, to be easily identified by the school community and responders in the event of an emergency.

With nearly 4,100 students, Brockton High is the largest high school in Massachusetts.

Malone said making security improvements at the school was not one of his major goals when he took over as superintendent last September. But it quickly rose to the top after the shooting.

“It allowed us to really focus a lot more attention and resources on safety and security,” he said. “The public is better served by the improvements we’ve made.”

Many of the future changes to improve security depend on money, and the district has little to spare.

But Malone said he’s now seeking a \$300,000 federal grant to pay for upgrades including security cameras, replacement doors and lighting.

Many of the school’s 50 exterior doors have antiquated locking mechanisms and don’t consistently lock and shut properly, school officials said.

The heavy-duty doors will cost \$10,000 a piece to replace, and Malone is seeking to replace 20 doors over the next two years.

Brockton High has 32 surveillance cameras currently, Szachowicz said.

“We need a lot more,” said Jean Ryan, housemaster for the school’s Yellow Building. “They are such a deterrent, it’s unbelievable.”

In the next year, district officials are also seeking to install the LobbyGuard visitor management system, which would let the school take photos of people visiting the building, scan driver’s licenses, print badges and store date and time visitor information. The system would cost \$8,500.

District officials also hope to install a wireless fiber optic network at the high school, with one of the purposes being to allow for improved communications and an “early warning system” to classrooms in the event of an emergency.

The system and supporting hardware would cost \$95,000.

In addition, the district plans to provide training on security issues to all staff members at Brockton High this year, Szachowicz said.

“Everybody in the school needs to take responsibility for safety and security,” she said.

Ward 6 School Committee member James Daley said officials may have to consider shifting money from other projects in the district to pay for the necessary security upgrades.

“This is a good start, but we’ve got a long way to go,” he said.

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