

The Q&A below contains more information about the School Safety Guardian program.

Why was the School Safety Guardian program the best option for Polk County Public Schools?

The new Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School Public Safety Act requires an armed law enforcement officer or guardian in each school. As a district, we have determined the statute allows for three options:

The first option requires a sworn law enforcement officer (commonly known as SROs) working in the school, who is employed by a local law enforcement agency. The second option is to provide a certified law enforcement officer, employed by either a local law enforcement agency or the district, in each school. The third option is to arm a school district employee through the state's guardian program.

We simply do not have the time or budget to identify, fund and train 85 new school resource officers — the number needed to have an officer at each of our campuses and be in compliance with state statute — within the required timeframe.

Superintendent Jacqueline Byrd remains steadfast that arming teachers or other existing school-based personnel is not the answer. Their attention must be on educating and serving students.

School Safety Guardians will be uniformed district employees. They present a feasible solution to improve our campus security and meet the requirements and deadlines set by the law. Each of these designated individuals must undergo a background check, drug test, psychological exam and 144 hours of specialized training.

How many School Safety Guardians will the district be hiring? How much will this cost? What funding source will be used to pay for this new safety initiative?

The School Safety Guardian program will require 91 new staff members.

There is a current need to fill 85 School Safety Guardian positions in schools. However, we intend on training 90 individuals to ensure we have coverage when people are out sick, are on vacation, etc.

We will also be hiring a Director of District School Safety to oversee these guardians.

New allocations of state Safe Schools funding will cover most of the employment costs.

The state is providing an additional \$3.3 million in Safe Schools funding. The School Safety Guardian program will cost approximately \$3.69 million. The shortfall of about \$400,000 will be paid using money from the district's general fund.

The Polk County Sheriff's Office will cover the costs of guardian training, supplies and equipment for being a guardian.

What are the differences between a school resource officer and a School Safety Guardian?

A school resource officer is a sheriff's deputy or a local police officer contracted by the school district to work in our schools.

A School Safety Guardian will be a school district employee who will be responsible for providing security to the school, as well as handling other new mandates within the recently passed Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School Public Safety Act.

This new employee position will be certified through the Polk County Sheriff's Office guardian program, which will allow them to carry a firearm on our campuses. They will have no authority to arrest and will not be considered law enforcement.

Why don't we just hire school resource officers to protect all of our campuses?

The costs involved in hiring additional school resource officers for our elementary schools (including salaries, training and equipment) will be in excess of three times the allocation we have been provided by the state to meet the statutory requirements.

In addition to serving as an armed guard, what other duties will the School Safety Guardians be responsible for handling?

These individuals will be responsible for working with the district's Safe Schools division to provide security to our campuses, conduct necessary drills, oversee crime prevention initiatives and programs with students, and conduct surveillance and other security-related tasks. These individuals are not intended to work with student discipline nor have any law enforcement authority.

When will the School Safety Guardians begin working in the schools?

We will be posting the job vacancies following School Board approval of the job descriptions. As candidates are vetted and approved for hire, we will begin working with the Polk County Sheriff's Office to conduct guardian training as the classes fill (every 15-20 hires).

How can someone apply to serve as a School Safety Guardian? What are the hiring qualifications?

The job description will soon be posted on the district's website and will contain the qualifications.

What campuses will be protected by School Safety Guardians? What campuses will be protected by school resource officers?

Elementary schools will have a School Safety Guardian. Middle and high schools will have a school resource officer from a local law enforcement agency. Technical colleges have high school programs, so they will have a school resource officer, and adult schools will have a School Safety Guardian.

Will larger campuses be assigned more than one School Safety Guardian or school resource officer?

The statute only requires one School Safety Guardian or school resource officer per school. However, the district has the authority to provide additional staff based on availability and the needs of the campus.

Will School Safety Guardians be hired and stationed at charter and private schools?

Charters are required to meet the same statutory requirements of public schools. They will need to make their own decisions on how to secure their campuses in accordance with state law. Private schools do not appear to be addressed in statute.

How much will School Safety Guardians be paid?

The starting salary for this position is \$30,000 a year plus benefits. This is for working 196 days per year — which equates to \$20 an hour.