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Legis. Rob Galardo (D-Patchogue), center, and Lieutenant Michael Alfano, left, both ensured a secure connection and response time to emergencies at Patchogue-Medford Schools at the March security-focused board meeting. Assistant superintendent of business and chief emergency officer for the school district, Dr. Donna Jones, right, provided updates to the audience on what has been done recently to prepare for a school shooting emergency.

Adv/Waszynski

Proactive security measures

Story By: **STAFF WRITER**

3/15/2018

BY RANDALL WASZYNSKI

Patchogue—Patchogue-Medford administrators, Suffolk County Police Department representatives and local government officials spoke before staff and parents at Bay Elementary School on March 12 to address upcoming and current security measures

districtwide.

"There are a multitude of things that we're doing on regular basis to ensure the safety of this community and the children and the staff," said Dr. Donna Jones, assistant superintendent of business and the recently appointed chief emergency officer. "We are very proactive, but we are always looking to do more."

The board meeting occurred in response to the increasing number of school shooting incidents nationwide, particularly the tragedy in Parkland, Fla.

"There are concerns, clearly, and we have students not only here, but across this great nation, who are articulating their concerns as far as what is happening with these tragedies over the past several years," said superintendent Dr. Michael Hynes.

Legis. Rob Calarco (D-Patchogue) also ensured that there is a secure connection between the school district and the police department in terms of response to an emergency. Security measures will be properly funded within his power, Calarco said.

"If you're properly prepared, we can stop a tragedy from really becoming a tragedy," Calarco said. "After Sandy Hook, our police department was very proactive about going to every single school district, making sure that we have a strategy."

Hynes said that the security guards in the district are either retired or off-duty police officers. "They are beyond trained, they love our kids, and they look out for our staff and everybody who walks into our school," Hynes said. "We're very thankful for their services."

There are 11 security guards in total, and Jones raised concern that since at least a portion of them are retired police officers, they are limited in terms of hours for health insurance reasons and there is a \$30,000 cap to their annual pensions. More security guards will be hired, Jones said, at the elementary and middle schools. Jones also pled to the government representatives to create exceptions regarding permits for security-related purchases and installations.

"This is a plea, and this is a persist," Jones said. "We have, at the state level, a 38- to 40-week backlog on capital projects, in general. If we just want a permit, it's going to take almost 40 weeks to get it. Our Assembly and our Senate: I don't know what you have to do to hire more staff at the state [level]. When I'm trying to get projects approved, and particular security, I shouldn't have to wait 40 weeks to get state aid on the project."

Jones also proposed higher prioritization by the state to aid these security projects financially.

There is a district-wide plan for security and safety that is updated monthly, at least, and the document is available on the school district's website. Jones stated that the most recent updates to the plan were relevant to the concepts of operation, prevention and intervention

strategies, training drills and exercises, early detection of potentially violent behavior, hazard notification, situational responses and arrangements for obtaining emergency assistance from local governments.

Plans for each building exist as well, but are not public information, and the staff within the building are briefed and aware of its intricacies of what needs to be done in lockdown and evacuation situations.

"We're not going to put floor plans of the buildings on websites," Jones said. "That's not going to be public info, and by law it cannot be public info to you because if that gets in the wrong hands, it's dangerous."

Surveillance cameras are present in school hallways, at entrances to the building and other areas in the district. An upgraded radio system with over 280 new receivers has already been implemented after concerns that the old radios could not get clear reception from the playground during recess. A blue light system is already in place, in which a principal, security personnel or others authorized to do so can remotely lock down the school.

"That further safeguards staff members and prevents anybody from coming into the building once the lockdown has been called," Jones said.

Within the next six to 12 months, the district will be constructing and installing traps at entrances that have an exterior and locked interior door, which can only be opened from the inside. Some of the entrances to buildings in the school district are already equipped with the trap.

"We're investigating the cost as of now, and we have designated that as a critical purchase so that everyone has to present their license and [go through] scanner checks, for additional background info on any visitor before they enter," Jones said.

A safety seminar is scheduled for the end of March with the SCPD for a setting where administrators of schools can present any concerns that arise regarding safety.

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