

Dreaming the Dreams of our Children

An S⁴ Prayer Request

Week of September 6, 2019 by Tom Deighan

This week, Duncan Police notified administration of an unverified threat on social media that reportedly involved Duncan High School. Local police, in cooperation with Duncan Public Schools officials, investigated every conceivable lead and interviewed every possible person. City and school staff invested literally hundreds of personnel hours over two days dealing with the matter, but no one could identify the source of the original rumor. As of submission of this article to *The Duncan Banner* at noon on Friday, the terms “reportedly” and “unverified” still defined the origin of the controversy best. Although by the end of the week, repeating of the rumor became another problem altogether for a few individuals. Concerns were certainly warranted, for we can take nothing for granted nowadays. I appreciate everyone’s trust and patience in this matter, as well as *The Duncan Banner’s* balanced reporting.

Such is the reality of public schools in 2019, even for rumors spawned by social media. The City of Duncan provides resource officers to Duncan Public Schools, but for the last few days, everyone at DPD seems to have acted as a resource officer. Thank you, Duncan Police, for protecting the children of this community every day, and we are especially grateful your invaluable reassurance to students, staff, and parents. If such efforts went into a rumor of a threat, I can only imagine your vigilance if, God forbid, a substantiated threat ever emerges.

Scarcely a day goes by without a similar situation going viral on social media, but thankfully, most threats lack substance. Occasionally, the threat is real enough to arrest someone – such as happened in Del City a week ago. We hear about so many incidents, due to social media and 24-hour news that we can easily live in state of constant fear. Nevertheless, being aware of such things does not necessarily mean that they are happening more often. In fact, this may shock many people and contradict what we may read on Facebook, but schools are safer than ever before.

The National Center for Educational Statistics tracks information related to school violence. Since 2001, “total victimization” has dropped about 66% and “violent victimization” has dropped 50%. School violence has steadily decreased for years, thanks mainly to laws requiring schools to formally track bullying and other issues. The most serious crimes, known as “serious violent victimization” have always been rare, involving less than one-half of one-percent of school children. Statistically speaking, this means that schools are safer than ever, and have been the safest place on earth for a child for decades. Please see: https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_cld.asp

Nevertheless, statistics mean nothing to parents or victims of violence, and such statistics are salt in the wound to communities traumatized by tragedy. Consequently, we will always take even the slightest hint of a threat seriously. We will also continue to foster our strong partnership with Duncan PD, because the best answer to an evil person with a gun will always be guns in the hand of trained personnel. Such a stance may not be delicate or politically correct, but I prefer defending this statement now rather than defending a choice to be defenseless in the future.

For six years, I have petitioned the churches in my community to pray for the safety of our schools on the Second Sunday of each month, and ironically enough, this is the first “second Sunday” of the school

year. I call it the S⁴ Prayer request – Second Sunday School Safety – and I now humbly request it of Duncan’s churches. Such a request is not very politically correct, either, but I am not asking anyone to pray at school, only churches – on Sunday – which certainly does not violate any laws. I would also appreciate it if the same churches would pray for wisdom for those guarding this community’s children. There are forces much more powerful than guns, and we can never afford to take anything for granted nowadays. Therefore, please consider starting a new S⁴ prayer tradition: Second Sunday School Safety.