TIPS Report Incident introduced to BPS

thethunderbeat.org/10623/news/tips-report-incident-introduced-to-bps/

On August 15, Bellevue Public Schools was one of four school districts, as well as 12 other agencies, in Sarpy County to adopt Awareity, Inc.'s Threat assessment Incident management Prevention Services (TIPS).

TIPS is an online prevention platform designed to "empower students, parents, teachers and community members to be heard and to anonymously report warning signs and trouble," according to the Bellevue Public Schools website.

"The goal of the program is for students and parents to use it to report incidents that are occurring in our school district," BPS superintendent Jeff Rippe said. "It is also a great way for Sarpy County agencies to collaborate to make sure we are providing the appropriate resources."

Although the platform was introduced to Bellevue at the beginning of the school year, few people are aware of its existence. In eight GPS classrooms, only two students knew about TIPS.

This information wasn't surprising, considering the lack of attention given to the hotline created in conjunction with Boys Town by Bellevue West's district safety committee in 2014–that hotline received one or two calls per month on average.

"This may not seem like a lot but if these calls save a life, it is enormous," principal Kevin Rohlfs said.

The hotline's purpose was similar to that of TIPS, but failed to fix problems going on within the school. The hope with TIPS is that people will be more compelled to voice concerns through an easily accessible program that allows them to maintain their confidentiality.

"A lot of people don't use the phone lines because it's, in some cases, not confidential, and it's definitely not anonymous," Awareity, Inc.'s Prevention Specialist Rick Shaw said. "Some people want that anonymity and protection. The beautiful thing about TIPS is you can access it anytime, anywhere. If you're at a coffee shop, library, wherever you are."

Another unique aspect of TIPS lies in its structure. Incident reports submitted to TIPS are routed to different officials within the school, district and county, depending on each individual case. A variety of tools within the platform allow these officials to collaborate "behind the scenes" in order to make an executive decision regarding the incident.

"A lot of the time we see that maybe you saw this piece of the puzzle, and a teacher saw this piece of the puzzle, and a parent saw this piece of the puzzle," Shaw said. "After the reports are made, the team behind the scenes can see all three pieces of the puzzle. That's how we can help connect the dots, the pieces of the puzzle, together more effectively."

Regardless of the incident, Coordinator of Student Services Kevin Mills has access to all reports in BPS.

"We decide if we need to do a threat assessment or follow up by schools, or by law enforcement," Mills said. "If assessment is needed, we dispatch law enforcement to complete the assessment, which has been created by the Secret Services. We can monitor all cases."

Now that Bellevue Public Schools has a set system in place to deal with incidents, one question still remains: Will TIPS actually work?

So far, evidence within the community is promising. On December 16, the Capt. Kevin Griger of Sarpy County Sheriff's Office published a press release celebrating the platform's 100th tip.

"Each of the 100 tips have been investigated," Griger said in the press release. "Some cases have been handled internally by school officials, while others have resulted in active investigations being initiated. The collaboration of many people involved in this process has already proven that when information is obtained and acted upon–great things can happen."

In order for TIPS to prove its effectiveness within Bellevue West, students have to first be aware of its existence. After that, it is up to students, as well as faculty and community members, to take the initiative to file a report.

Shaw emphasized the importance of student involvement in the platform.

"We know people know things," Shaw said. "You students know all kinds of things that adults don't know. We're needing help."

In addition to reporting dangerous incidents, TIPS allows for feedback on positive happenings as well. Individuals can also report acts of kindness within the school, heroes within the community, and suggestions.

Overall, TIPS has potential in BPS, but only if Bellevue residents choose to take advantage of this resource.

"We hope it does impact students," Rippe said. "We want students to feel safe at school. TIPS provides students and parents another resource to provide information to the school or law enforcement. If students use this, it should only make our schools safer."