



ART BY Sophia Sepulveda



School Safety

Everyday threats to students are impacted by teachers, administration, and the campus environment

Liberty Pittman
Junior-Editor-in-Chief

The door opens, as math teacher Kelly Flickinger is teaching her lesson, revealing police officers. The class stops and stares as a student is escorted out of the room. Lesson forgotten, the question on everyone's mind was 'what happened?'. In this case, the student who was removed was pulled because they had made threatening statements during the passing period. As more and more threats are posted online or spread by word of mouth each day, it becomes harder for school administrators and safety personnel to quickly and accurately assess whether or not the threats are valid. According to the Everytown website, there have been a minimum of 200 instances of gunfire in schools since the start of 2024, which is more than the recorded number in 2023. With this rise in threatening behavior on school grounds, accurate threat assessment could be more important than ever. "I think students realize, hey, this is kind of a big deal," Flickinger said. "This is the safety of others, this is important. I think it is important for kids to know we take this seriously. I think kids feel safe knowing that there is attention being brought to stuff, and it's not just ignored or brushed under the rug, because that's when unsafe things happen. More knowledge and more information is going to cause intelligence and hopefully a safer environment."

EMERGENCY PREP AND MANAGEMENT

In 2019 the Texas Senate passed Bill 11 (TEC; 37.115) which made it a state requirement that all schools have a Safe and Supportive School Program (SSSP) team. According to AISD the SSSP team is responsible for threat assessment and determining the appropriate actions to take, and the team includes members with varied backgrounds including school administration, counseling, behavioral management, school safety/security, law enforcement, and more. One of the members of this team was former Assistant Principal Hector Munoz who has left Bowie and will work at another school. "We all have to be trained in threat assessment behaviors, and all as administrators go through that course, we have to be certified," Munoz said. "Once a threat has been issued, we as administrators, link up and start to follow that checklist that the district gives us, and guidelines and procedures. Then we incorporate our SROs, and our counselors, and there's a threat assessment team on campus that I'm ahead of as well. We coordinate together, and we evaluate the student and then whether they fall into one caveat or the next, it's after that investigation." AISD's emergency management system includes preparedness, response, recovery, mitigation, community engagement, and compliance. Their goal is to ensure the safety of everyone; students, staff, and the local community, in all types of emergency situations. According to a poll of 311 Bowie students, 41.2% of students feel only slightly confident about the schools ability to protect them in an emergency situation, and 26% of students feel not at all confident. "We have systems set in place to evacuate classrooms," Flickinger said. "We know what those are. We practice those. I don't feel like my students would freak out and not know how to get out of the classroom. Our school does a good job at making sure that we follow the state standards and AISD standards to make sure that students know

what to do in the case of an emergency." After threat assessment is done the campus principal and AISD administration are in charge of information distribution. According to the poll of Bowie students, 69.4% of students believe it is very important that the school clearly communicates safety issues to them. However 34.8% of students believe the school communicates safety issues somewhat poorly, and 22.3% of students believe the school communicates them very poorly. "Threats get posted a lot more than students even realize," Flickinger said. "It is great when students are made aware of threats immediately, and know they are being looked into by administration. However it is important to evaluate rumors before announcing there is a threat, and when students do believe rumors without further information it can make it seem like there was a threat when there wasn't one. When threats are authentic the administrators do their best to make sure everyone has all the information they need." In order to prepare for potential disasters, students, teachers, and administrators participate in many drills. These include hold, secure, lockdown, evacuate, and shelter. "We don't do enough safety practice and we don't do it often enough," sophomore Liam Sullivan said. "We don't really know certain variables. If something happened during passing periods or during lunch, we wouldn't know what to do." Bowie administration uses other devices than drills to help educate students on how to stay safe, they also create lessons given to students by teachers either during class or during mandatory FTT sessions. On October 7, there was a FIT session about online safety and the warning signs of someone who may want to harm others. "Bowie handles threats by making us go to a fit and talk about it, they do it by making us have a conference," junior Alison Milla said. "They haven't really been reaching out to students that much, and they haven't shown that they care about students' mental health. They should be making adults reachable, making teachers more reachable, and encouraging them to have a relationship with students, to really talk to them. Sometimes the teachers are the only people who the students feel safe with."

EVERYDAY THREATS TO SAFETY

There are other problems for schools that aren't as obvious as a threatening phone call, but still impact students. These include bullying and similar behavior. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics(NCES), in the 2021-22 school year 19.2% of students in grades 6-12 reported being bullied in school, some of the most common forms of bullying reported were being the subject of rumors, being insulted or made fun of, being pushed, tripped, shoved, or spit on, or being purposefully excluded. "I do believe bullying is a problem at Bowie, especially racial bullying," Milla said. "I feel like it doesn't really get a consequence, and students are not really scared to do it. People have been doing it on social media and many other platforms, and I feel like it hasn't been addressed. The school doesn't really show that they care about it, and I'm scared that if I tell them how I'm feeling, they might just make me watch a video or do some activity that's not gonna help me in any way"

Bullying can lead to physical outbursts and violence by both the bully and the victim, which can be made worse when there are weapons present. According to the American Knife and Tool Institute, in the state of Texas a minor is allowed to own a knife, they just can't carry them without adult consent

and supervision. According to the Texas State Law Library in the state of Texas minors aren't permitted to own firearms unless under specific circumstances. Under the AISD student code of conduct, students may not bring any weapons or intimidation weapons onto campus. "The weapon policy that kind of makes sense, no bringing weapons, but students still do it," Milla said. "I've heard of it from people bringing knives or pocket knives. I do feel like sometimes weapons can be safe because you never know what's going to happen at school, but I also feel like students are kind of provoking something by having a weapon with them. " Other items prohibited by the AISD student code of conduct include drugs, alcohol, all vape products, tobacco products, and any items mimicking drugs or contraband. Although they are prohibited, Milla believes that substances are a major safety concern, and has had experiences where she feels the restrooms on campus are unusable due to people's substance use. "Substance use is very concerning because it happens all the time in the bathrooms," Milla said. "We see people vaping in the bathrooms, zoning out, and just being in an unwell state. Students can bring their little pen and no one ever notices that. Sometimes they even take it out during class, and it's very concerning about it, and how much confidence they have. It makes me concerned, because I feel like at one point I'm gonna get pressure to do it, and I really don't want to."

According to Cleveland Clinic vaping can lead to serious health problems such as damage to the lungs and other organs, cancer, addiction, and potential future cigarette use. Many E-cigarettes contain a pod with the liquid that is heated to create the aerosol vapor like substance which is inhaled. According to the CDC the liquid in vapes is normally a combination of water, flavoring, nicotine, cannabis, propylene glycol, or vegetable glycerin. "Do I believe that if students come under the influence, it affects other students? Yes," Munoz said. "If a student is under the influence, they're not going to be able to learn. We've had instances on this campus in the past where students vape something not knowing what's in the vape, and then, consequently, they have an allergic reaction or something bad happens in their organs and internally and that causes them to go to the hospital. Absolutely substances play into school safety because one, it's illegal, two, you don't know what's in it, and three, we don't know how your body is going to react to it, and how to treat it."

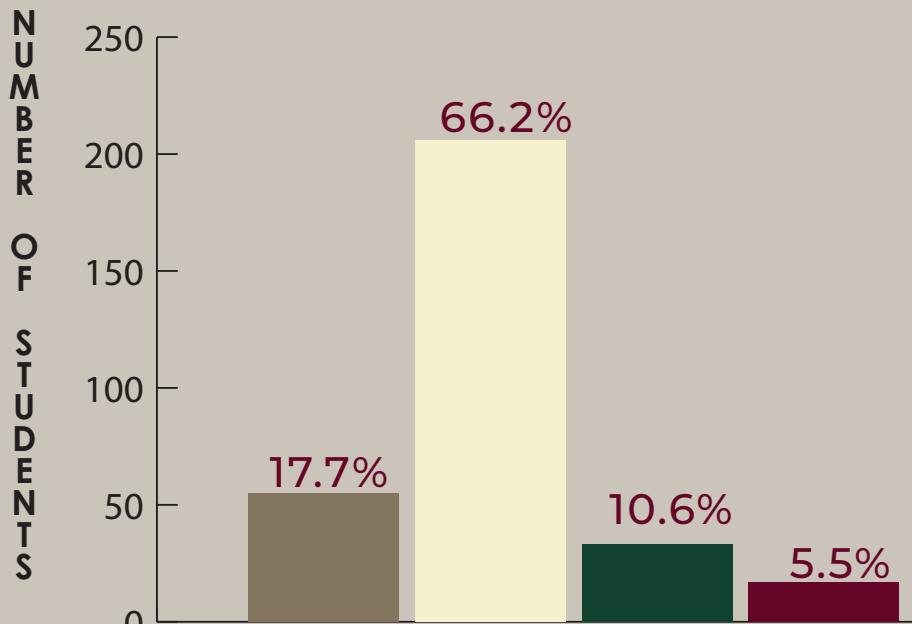
CURRENT ENVIRONMENT AND POLICIES

The Bowie campus is located on 60 acres of land and contains three main buildings, the academic, athletic, and fine arts buildings, as well as portables. The main area of the school has two primary entrances, the doors in the front by the office and the bus gate in the back. There are also doors at the end of every downstairs hallway. "Being an open campus, stuff can come in and out," Munoz said. "Whether it's homeless people from the Yellowway that kind of trickle in, or snakes; we've had them. Just being so large and not being fully 100% surrounded by a fence or something like that, where there's a one way in, one way out, that's probably the biggest threat to safety, being an open campus and not having the capacity to kind of lock it all the way down. We could build a 20 foot fence around it, and even then, when we do that in the back, people still come around and knock it

ART BY Sophia Sepulveda

Bowie Poll Demographic Data

Of 311 students polled: 20.3% freshmen, 36.7% sophomores, 25.4% juniors, 17.7% seniors, 63.3% Female, 33.5 % Male, 1.3% Non-Binary/other, 1.9% prefer not to say



Very safe Somewhat safe Somewhat unsafe Very unsafe

What students feel threatens their safety

WEAPONS BROUGHT ONTO CAMPUS 31%



SUBSTANCE USE 14.4%



VANDALISM AND PROPERTY DAMAGE 3.9%



OUTSIDE INTRUDERS 19%



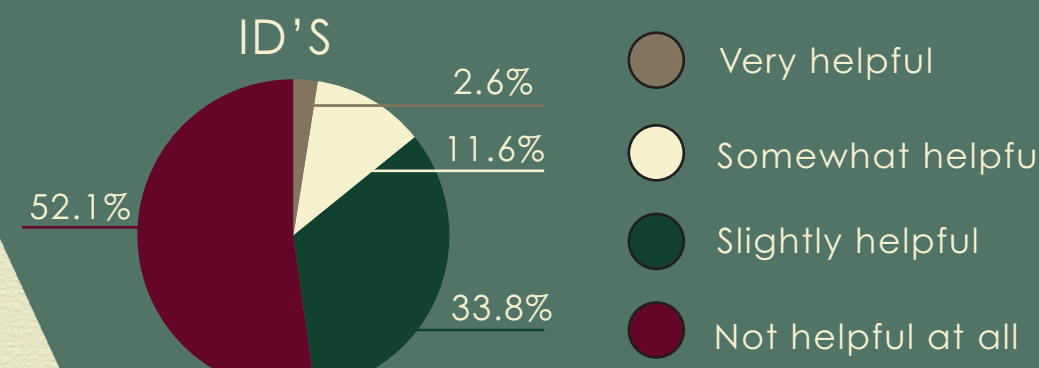
STUDENTS IN THE SCHOOL 22.9%



OTHER 8.8%

INFOGRAPHIC AND ART BY Liberty Pittman

HOW HELPFUL ARE CURRENT SAFETY DEVICES TO STUDENTS



Very helpful Somewhat helpful Slightly helpful Not helpful at all

