

**Proposed Improvements for  
DISD Police and District Security  
Mark Wittie  
Chief of Police  
Dalhart ISD Police Department**

**Introduction**

During this school year I have been able to identify several areas that need improvement to benefit either our overall district security and/or our school district police department. These improvements can be categorized as personnel, training, or equipment. The improvements are listed below in the order by which I believe the district will see the greatest benefit to our overall safety and security needs. I have also included information obtained from Elizabeth Thomas at Panhandle Regional Planning Commission about grant opportunities that could assist in the funding of improvements.

**Personnel**

In order to insure the safety and security of our district, the district police department needs to expand by two positions. These additional positions will provide more efficient physical security and law enforcement services to our district allowing better coverage of our campuses and lessening the strain on the department.

Although our district is relatively small by comparison to other districts in our area, the current staffing of only one position does not allow complete coverage. For example, instead of being able to concentrate the majority of the day on an assigned campus, I am responsible for providing police services to five campuses. Therefore, when a situation arises at one campus, my duties at the other campuses suffer. There have been times when I have been busy at one campus and things needing my attention at other campuses have had to be delayed until a later time. Additionally, there have been instances when I have had to be out of the district and we had no coverage until I returned to duty. Adding the two additional positions will allow the department to spread the work load and operate more efficiently.

The two additional positions will be assigned to the Junior High and XIT. The XIT position will also cover the Elementary and Intermediate Schools. This will allow our department to have fulltime coverage at the High School and Junior High where the majority of the issues are that need law enforcement attention. Due to the low volume of calls at the Elementary and Intermediate schools, the XIT position can also present educational programs on

a regular basis to the elementary and intermediate students which will contribute to improving behavior and responsibility.

Extra-curricular activities are another area that will benefit from the additional positions. I try to attend every varsity home sport in an official capacity to provide security and law enforcement. However, due to scheduling that isn't always going to be possible. The additional positions will allow our department to have a presence at all extra-curricular activities occurring on our property. During events such as home football games, all three officers will be in attendance as opposed to just one. Being able to have the additional personnel at these activities, improves overall security and the safety of the officers, as well as, visitors should an incident occur that might pose a danger to members of the public. As it is now, I am the only officer at most of these events and will have to rely on other agencies responding should additional officers be needed.

The additional positions would be an added expense on the district involving two additional salaries, and equipment including vehicles for each position. However, much of the expense, with the exception of salary, would either be a onetime expense or would not occur annually, such as replacing uniforms and other equipment as needed.

### **Training**

With an increase in personnel, the district will also have to increase our training budget. The Texas Commission on Law Enforcement Officers Standards and Education, our governing agency, requires all commissioned peace officers to complete 40 hours of training every two years. This training can be in any variety of subject matter pertaining to law enforcement, but each officer must complete the 40 hour requirement. Our departments training budget is currently \$1000.00 per year. The training budget will need to be increased to \$3000.00 per year giving each officer \$1000.00 per year for training. Training funds cover cost of classes, travel, lodging and expenses (meals,ect.). In some cases, classes are offered locally through Amarillo College and are covered by PRPC so they are free to any officer that attends. However, the free training is usually only 8 hours and can be on any topic.

Any officer employed by a school district needs to complete Active Threat training and Basic SRO (School Resource Officer) training. These classes are usually offered at various locations throughout the state. Each school is 40 hours long and will satisfy the state requirement for one two year cycle.

### **Equipment**

## *Security Cameras*

The biggest improvement that the district can make in terms of security equipment is to replace all the existing security cameras on our campuses and add cameras to any district property that does not currently have a security system. Of the campuses that currently have cameras, the High School is the only location that has working cameras. However the DVR unit at the High School does not work so we are unable to record. These changes do not have to take place at the same time. We can prioritize where we need the changes made and they can take place as the funding is available.

Having an up to date camera system district wide will greatly increase our overall security and provide vital information if we are faced with an active threat. The system will also provide valuable evidence of any criminal offence that may occur in our district. In 2006 Dumas ISD began the instillation of a camera system in there district and now have 314 cameras district wide. They camera system has proved invaluable in solving criminal cases and being able to see the activity in and around district property. During the summer months of 2010, one of their elementary schools was burglarized by juveniles resulting in damages and theft totaling over \$30,000. The case was cleared and charges were filed in a matter of days due to the suspects being caught on camera. Student discipline also improved because students became aware that the camera system records their behavior.

I spoke to Chief Larry Payne with Dumas ISD Police Department and Chief David Sirmon with Highland Park ISD Police Department in reference to their camera systems. Chief Payne told me that their cameras were purchased from and installed by Security Specialists in Amarillo. Chief Payne could not give me a total cost of the system but said that they were able to offset the cost with approximately \$100,000 in grant funds. Chief Sirmon told me that he recently updated their system from Security Specialists to a system with Guardian in Lubbock. Chief Sirmon said that Guardian installed 126 cameras district wide along with a new electronic door lock system that operates from a key fob. The door locks can also operate on a card key like an ID card. The total cost to Highland Park for the cameras and door locks installed was \$95,000 dollars. The quote from Security Specialists for a similar system was \$300,000. Chief Sirmon is very pleased with the Guardian system.

## *Cop Sync- telecommunication system*

Cop Sync is a computer system that links law enforcement agencies together into the same system. The system allows agencies to share information so that every officer gets important information instantly. Cop Sync eliminates the need to send teletypes between agencies or make phone calls in order to get information out during a crisis. Cop Sync also allows officers and agencies to share everyday information in reference to day to day operations. The Cop Sync system also includes the ability to complete all our necessary reporting and would

replace our existing report writing system. The system can be accessed and ran from a desktop computer and/or an in car laptop.

I have contacted the area rep for Cop Sync to get some additional information about their system, but as of now, I haven't been able to set a time to meet with him. Our department is the only law enforcement agency in Hartley or Dallam Counties that is not on Cop Sync.

### **Grant Funding**

There are two grant funding opportunities for our department in the coming year. The State of Texas, Office of the Governor offers the Justice Assistance grant that is awarded every year to agencies to fund various areas. The application process will be opened up in December of 2013 and we are eligible to apply. I talked to Elizabeth Thomas at PRPC about the JAG grant. Mrs. Thomas said the grant could be used to fund any equipment or positions. Equipment can be funded in its entirety and additional positions are set up on a five year grant that diminishes every year until the end of the grant period at which time the district will have to pick up funding. I believe she said the decrease per year is 20 percent.

The Department of Homeland Security also offers funding that would pay for equipment. The DHS grant has an open enrollment and can be applied for at any time. Mrs. Thomas said she would get more information about the DHS grant and get it to me. Chief Sirmon with HPISD Police Department also told me that Guardian has all the information on the DHS grant program and can assist us in applying for the grant to fund a security system. I have not contacted Guardian. I want to get the board's approval before I set anything in motion.

### **Conclusion**

Although we have made many improvements over the last year in terms of district security, there are many more steps that need to be made in order to insure that our district is as safe as possible for our students, staff, and any member of the public that comes onto our property. These improvements can be costly. However, I believe the available grant funding will allow us to implement these improvements without worrying about over extending the district financially. The funds will either pay in full or allow us to prepare to take over funding over a period of time so that we are not hit with the total cost up front. I hope this proposal gives a good indication of what is needed and I will be happy to answer any questions you might have in reference to our department and our district security.

