

Jackson County schools to launch anonymous texting tip line



JACKSON COUNTY, MS (WLOX) -

Jackson County students will soon have a discreet way to report bullying, threats, or suspicious activity. This week, the Jackson County School Board approved a \$7,000 system that gives students an anonymous tip line.

The superintendent said the district had considered the system before, but the tragedy at Sandy Hook Elementary School last year prompted district leaders to take action. The texting tip line allows Jackson County students to report problems instantly, and get help immediately.

"If they're aware of situations that are going on that could be harmful to other people in the school or to themselves, they have a quick spontaneous connection to a counselor, principal, or assistant principal," said Dr. Barry Amacker, Jackson County Schools Superintendent.

The "Talk About It" program will be implemented in all three middle schools in Jackson County, and on a trial basis at St. Martin High School.

Here's how it works: Students will be given several phone numbers to reach either an administrator or a counselor. If they encounter any incidence of bullying, threats, or a suspicious person on campus, they can send a text to any of those numbers and an administrator will investigate the report.

"It would give us a head start on heading off a potential problem. To me, that's reassuring to the administration and it should be for the students to know that they have a quick connection to help if they need it," said Amacker.

The system is not just to report potential trouble. It's also for students who are crying out for help.

"It's far reaching than that to me. There could be a kid that's just destitute and don't really know what to do, and they can have this number to call. Or they know of a friend that's in a bad situation, or maybe they saw something suspicious on the way to school," said Amacker.

While the system is anonymous, there is a way to track down students who threaten suicide or make threats to harm others. Amacker said that should deter students from abusing the system.

Right now, students are not allowed to have cell phones on campus in Jackson County schools. So in order for students to be able to text their concerns, the Jackson County School Board will have to revise its phone policy.

Administrators say this technology, along with alert students, will lead to a safer campus.

"So in a sense, we turned the school into a thousand set of eyes that are out there helping and can let us know. We just believe that our students want a safe and orderly environment, which we're proud that we have, but we want to keep it that way," said Amacker.

Parents can also use the tip-line. The system should be up and running in a couple of weeks.