
DeSoto school board members focus on safety issues

By Ron Maxey

Monday, February 4, 2013

Safety was a high priority for DeSoto County school board members Monday as they considered two measures related to the issue.

In one measure, the board approved hiring Allen & Hoshall to do engineering work on a pair of projects designed to enhance security in the district's 42 schools. One project calls for re-keying doors at all schools, while a separate project Allen & Hoshall would oversee calls for installing video systems that would allow office workers to visually communicate with visitors before they enter the building.

School safety has drawn increased scrutiny from districts across the country in the wake of the Sandy Hook school shootings in Newtown, Conn., in December.

"The second project may require replacement of some exterior doors," Thomas Spencer, associate superintendent of Business and Finance for DeSoto County Schools, said of the plan to add video surveillance. "We won't know until the architect gives us an idea."

Supt. Milton Kuykendall said the move was an effort to continue to improve security in the district, the state's largest public school district.

"These are some of the safety procedures we're trying to get in place to control people entering our buildings," he said. "We've made some gains in the last few years, but we need to do more."

On the second safety-related topic, the board heard on first reading about a new school safety policy drafted by John Caldwell, the district's transportation director. Assc. Supt. Keith Williams said the policy would cover both crisis response and occupational safety at all schools.

Board members heard no details and took no action on the plan, which will be considered for a vote at the next meeting.

