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TOP STORY

## Bag checks, metal detectors included in Aiken School District's upgraded security procedures

BY MAAYAN SCHECHTER [mschechter@aikenstandard.com](mailto:mschechter@aikenstandard.com) Jan 31, 2017 Updated Feb 3, 2017



In light of Friday night's shooting outside South Aiken High School, the Aiken County School District released upgraded security procedures for future school-related athletic events.

Three people were shot outside South Aiken High just after 9 p.m. Friday after a fight broke out in front of the school's entrance.

Before the fight, nearly 1,000 students, spectators and guests had attended the rivalry girl's and boy's basketball games between South Aiken and Aiken high schools.

A news release provided by the School District on Tuesday states enhanced security measures for "major athletic events" will include:

- Each middle and high school will have uniformed law enforcement to assist with security at all major sporting events. In addition to police, school administration will develop and execute a specified plan of supervision to include enhanced security before, during and after the event. Law enforcement and/or school staff will regularly monitor hallways, common areas, parking lots and outdoor areas. Law enforcement will take an active role in securing the building exterior and parking areas as patrons and students exit the venue.
- School staff will conduct a visual search of all bags and jackets/coats prior to entry. Students and families are asked to leave bags, backpacks and additional items at home, if possible. Per South Carolina law, concealed weapons permits are not honored on school campuses.
- Metal detectors will be available, visible and used by school staff prior to entry, as deemed necessary.

The School District said certain training aspects will need to take place prior to some of the enhanced measures being utilized. However, the addition of uniformed law enforcement at middle and high schools was put into effect Monday night.

"Friday night's incident was a terrible shock to our entire educational community," District Superintendent Dr. Sean Alford said in the release. "We are certainly relieved and thankful that none of the victims sustained life-threatening injuries and that all three are expected to make full recoveries."

Aiken City and County police responded to South Aiken just after 9 p.m. Friday after a fight broke out in front of the school's main entrance, where someone used a gun to shoot three people.

The shooting victims – a 13-year-old girl, a 45-year-old woman and a 19-year-old man – were all taken to area hospitals with non-life-threatening injuries.

Aside from five administrators and 11 faculty members on-site, six off-duty, uniformed police were at the school before and during the rivalry basketball games between South Aiken and Aiken high schools. All had weapons on them, said Lt. Karl Odenthal with Aiken Public Safety.

The School District said school officials and staff worked throughout the weekend with law enforcement to provide leads and identified potential witnesses for police.

A suspect has still not been identified or arrested.

Meanwhile, Odenthal told the *Aiken Standard* on Monday additional police officers were to be present at South Aiken and Aiken at least for the next couple of days.

"While Friday night's incident has weighed heavy on the hearts and minds of all of us this weekend, our students, athletes and staff have shown great strength throughout the last several days, many assisting law enforcement with the investigation, others returning to campus for athletic practices and academic study sessions held throughout the weekend," South Aiken Principal Jill Jett said in the release.

Jett added, "A strong police presence and additional security measures, coupled with an increase of school counselors on-site, are part of our plans to ensure our school soon returns to the nurturing educational environment we all know and love."

### **USCA has security procedures in place**

USC Aiken also has security procedures in place to ensure the safety of students, faculty, staff and guests.

During an emergency situation – such as an active shooter or a severe weather event – USC Aiken uses a mass notification system from Alertus Technologies to notify the campus.

When activated, the system sends a desktop notification to users that immediately grabs their attention with a full-screen, pop-up alert and instructions, according to a news release from Alertus.

"The safety and security of our students, faculty, staff and guests is a top priority, and we are always exploring ways to enhance our safety measures on campus," said Kevin Liles, chief of USCA's University Police Department. "To that end, University Computer Services Division and the Police Department recently launched an emergency notification app called Alertus+."

Liles said the Alertus+ app works in conjunction with security measures already in place on campus.

"This is an additional layer of security for our students, faculty and staff that enhances other longstanding security features on campus, such as security cameras, emergency call boxes, card access system, text messaging, loud speakers and a desktop notification system," he said.

When a user touches the "Call Public Safety" option on the Alertus+ app, a call goes out to the University Police Department and directly to the radio of the officer on duty, Liles said. App users also receive any mass notifications sent out to the USCA community.

"So even those users who have not registered a cellphone number through Self Service Carolina or VIP will still receive the notifications," he said.

### **ATC alerts campus in emergencies**

Timely, accurate communication is critical in emergency situations, said Nikasha N. Dicks, Aiken Technical College's interim director of Marketing and Public Relations, in a statement concerning the college's security procedures.

Aiken Technical College currently uses Regroup to send out messaging via texts, emails and automated phone calls. This system is an "opt-out" system; therefore, everyone associated with the college – employees and students – receive all emergency notifications, Dicks said.

Through additional coordinated efforts, information also is shared through the campus internal portal, ATC website and the college's official social media accounts.

"Providing a safe environment for those who work, study and visit the campus is of the utmost importance to the college," ATC President Dr. Forest Mahan said. "This is why the college's security team regularly meets to review emergency operation procedures, a reflection of our culture of continuous improvement.

"The college is also grateful to have a close working relationship with the Aiken County Sheriff's Office, which allows for open lines of communication and collaboration. The Sheriff's Office shares an on-campus substation with the college's security team, and an ACSO deputy assigned to the college works in conjunction with our team."

ATC is required to report incidents as defined by the Clery Act.

Only one incident, a liquor law violation, was reported from 2012 to 2015, the latest reporting period. To view ATC's full security report, visit the college's website at [www.atc.edu/Offices/Campus-Safety/Annual-Security-Report](http://www.atc.edu/Offices/Campus-Safety/Annual-Security-Report).

*Staff writer Larry Wood contributed to the report.*

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**Aiken Public Safety increase presence at 2 high schools after shooting at South Aiken**



**Police: 13-year-old girl among those shot at South Aiken High School on Friday night**