

SANTA-ROSA

# Want to be a 'guardian?' Santa Rosa County school district posts first job listing

**Alex Miller**

Pensacola News Journal

Published 6:02 a.m. CT May 26, 2022 | Updated 9:27 p.m. CT May 26, 2022

The Santa Rosa County School District recently posted the first job listing for a "guardian" role in the county.

Guardians are armed personnel tasked with working with law enforcement agencies to prevent school shootings. Florida established the guardian program in the wake of the Feb. 14, 2018, shooting in which a former student shot and killed 17 people at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland.

The new job listing is the latest development in the district's exploration of incorporating the guardian program in Santa Rosa County schools by as early as fall.

District Safety Director Daniel Hahn emphasized while the positions are open to be filled, that does not necessarily mean the district will have many, if any, guardians next year if none of the applicants prove to be qualified.

**SROs in Escambia County:** Sheriff names 7 schools where SROs could be reduced as budget fight continues

**Background on Guardians in SRC:** Guardian program still on table as Santa Rosa County School District researches other districts

The local guardian role has specific minimum qualifications, like at least three years of experience in the fields of law enforcement, security or military, the ability to receive and maintain a school guardian certificate from the Santa Rosa County Sheriff's Office and the ability to pass a psychological evaluation, among others.

Guardians must undergo 144 hours of training with law enforcement and pass a drug test and psychological exam. They cannot perform arrests or other functions of sworn law enforcement officers.

"Now, it really just depends on whether we get applicants or not. But our guardian program this year is in test mode, if you will," Hahn said, emphasizing any guardians would be supplemental to school resource officers.

**Live updates:** Texas school gunman warned of attack with online messages before rampage; Beto O'Rourke confronts Abbott: Live updates

**'So many crushed spirits':** President Biden addresses nation after Texas school shooting

According to Hahn, for the upcoming school year, any guardian employed by the district will operate on an on-call basis. He said the position is part-time and will be paid \$25 per hour for the time the guardians are asked to provide their service, although their hours may vary depending on the need.

"We might have them sit at a school for a day or a week (at a time)," Hahn said.

Superintendent Karen Barber previously told the News Journal that members of an existing school safety task force have been researching how the program works at four other comparable counties — Sumter, Okaloosa, Walton and Marion counties — and met with officials from the Santa Rosa County Sheriff's Office, Milton and Gulf Breeze police departments and NAS Whiting Field.

Of Florida's 67 counties, 45 have guardian programs, including Escambia County, while Santa Rosa County does not currently have such a program in place.

Discussions about implementing the program in Santa Rosa County schools heated up last summer when County Commissioner James Calkins unsuccessfully tried to attach the condition of implementing the program to funding an unrelated SRO salary request. Shortly after that, the Milton City Council passed a resolution encouraging the district to implement the guardian program.

"I'm really proud of (the school district) for trying, and I see it as a positive effort," Calkins told the News Journal on Tuesday of the district's newest plan with the guardian program.

He said he sees the program as something that is proactive.

"We want our schools to be a safe environment," Calkins said.

Hahn said he has already been contacted three times by people looking for more information on the positions but stressed there is a level of prudence being taken by the district.

"We are being cautious. We're not blindly jumping in. We're not Icarus. We're not going to fly too close to the sun," Hahn said.