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Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency Visits Indiana Area School District, Highlights Programs to Keep Youth Safe and Healthy for Back-To-School Season

Indiana, PA — Today, **Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency (PCCD) Executive Director Mike Pennington** visited Indiana Area School District (IASD) to highlight their work with School Mental Health & Safety and Security funding provided through PCCD's School Safety and Security Committee, and to encourage schools to participate in the 2023-24 Pennsylvania Youth Survey (PAYS).

"Keeping Pennsylvania youth safe and healthy is a top priority of the Shapiro-Davis Administration," **Pennington** stated. "Our kids can't learn if they don't feel safe within the walls of their school. It was great to hear first-hand from staff and students at Indiana Area School District about the great work being done to support students and make learning environments safer now and in the future."

Since 2018, PCCD has awarded nearly \$500 million through the School Safety and Security Grant Program to over 750 eligible school entities throughout the Commonwealth to support school safety needs. Funds have been used to support a wide variety of physical security enhancements for school buildings, address student behavioral health needs, and support COVID-19 mitigation efforts. Last year, school entities including school districts, area career and technical schools, intermediate units, charter schools, regional charter schools and cyber charter schools were eligible to apply for formula-based funds to focus on both mental health initiatives and physical security upgrades.

"The support provided by the PCCD is invaluable to providing a safe and supportive learning environment in our schools," said **IASD Superintendent of Schools Rob Heinrich**. "Through this partnership, we have been able to significantly improve both preventative measures and the physical safety of our schools."

Like hundreds of other school entities around Pennsylvania, IASD has benefited directly from this important school safety initiative. Over the past five years, the district has received nearly \$790,000 in funding to support personnel, security enhancements, and behavioral curriculum.

“The partnership with the Indiana Borough Police has proven to provide several benefits, completely exceeding our expectations. This partnership would not have been possible without the support of the PCCD,” said **IASD Board President Walter Schroth**.

Most recently, the district was awarded approximately \$282,600 in FY22-23 School Mental Health and Safety & Security funding. With this funding, they have supported costs associated with contracting a full-time school police officer from the Indiana Borough Police Department, safety and security reviews and trainings, Youth Mental Health First Aid training for teachers and high school students, and a full-time School Psychologist to work at the district’s high school and junior high.

The district is also one of 364 school districts registered to participate in the 2023-24 PAYS. The PAYS is free for schools and all student surveys are voluntary, anonymous, and confidential. The survey asks students in grades 6, 8, 10, and 12 questions about their school environment and their knowledge and attitudes towards mental health, alcohol, tobacco, other drugs, and violence. Findings from the PAYS can help school districts:

- Implement proper programs that address youth development and appropriate prevention programming;
- Develop the right strategies to keep student safety a priority; and
- Give students a voice on what’s occurring in their schools, community environment, and family lives.

“The best approach to safety is to take proactive, preventative measures. By analyzing the data provided by the PAYS survey, we are able to dedicate resources to critical areas of need such as mental health support for our students,” said **Indiana Area School District Director of Education Justin Zahorchack**.

Registration for the 2023-24 PAYS is currently open and accepting new registrants until late November. For more information on the PAYS and how to participate visit pays.pa.gov.

For more information on PCCD’s School Safety and Security Grant Program visit our [website](#).

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