

Starkville Oktibbeha School District

May 6, 2025

This morning, school administrators at Henderson Ward Stewart Elementary were alerted to a possible safety concern involving a student's backpack. The report was made by a student based on something seen on the school bus. Administrators identified the location of the backpack on campus and cleared the classroom. After investigation, staff discovered a handgun inside the bag. The Oktibbeha County Sheriff's Department, Starkville Police Department and Crisis Hotline were immediately notified about the discovery. At no time was anyone harmed, and no threats were made toward any students or staff.

SOCSD staff and School Resource Officers acted quickly and safely to handle the reported incident according to all district safety protocols and procedures. An ongoing investigation is being conducted by the Oktibbeha County Sheriff's Department, and the district is fully cooperating.

While we cannot share specific details regarding any student matter, we want to emphasize that the safety of our students and staff remains the district's top priority. We understand that this kind of news can cause concern for families, and we want to assure each of you that Henderson Ward Stewart remains a safe and nurturing place for learning and for the children in our care.

Out of an abundance of caution, the district will provide increased law enforcement presence on the HWS campus in the

coming days. We will also continue to provide support to students and staff who may need to talk with a counselor or social worker.

We are thankful for the quick and diligent work of our staff, Jacket Police officers and local law enforcement this morning. We also encourage our students to continue to speak up and talk with our staff if they see or hear of anything that may be a safety concern for themselves or their classmates. We ask our families and community for continued partnership in reminding students that weapons of any kind have no place at school. Working together, we can ensure that our schools remain safe places where students can grow, learn and thrive.