

## PINE TREE INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

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### Pine Tree Teacher Awarded For Promoting School Safety

By [MAGGIE SOUZA](#), Longview News Journal  
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School safety becomes a hot topic immediately after tragedies such as the Virginia Tech shooting in April that left 33 people dead. But for Pine Tree High School teacher Candee Collins, safety has always been a No. 1 issue.



*Special to the News-Journal*

*Pine Tree High School teacher Candee Collins, right, accepted the 2007 Safe School Leadership Award this summer from the National Association of School Resource Officers. The presentation took place during a conference in Orlando, Fla. Also pictured is Kevin Quinn, Region 7 director for the national organization.*

It's not just that Collins is aware of how important school safety is. The 22-year Pine Tree veteran also tries to instill awareness in her students and her fellow educators.

That is the main reason she was awarded the 2007 Safe School Leadership Award by the National Association of School Resource Officers this summer, said Kevin Quinn, Region 7 director for the national organization.

"It's obvious that she goes the extra mile and she gives above and beyond in the area of school safety," Quinn said.

He praised a number of Collins' achievements and activities. She organized the district-wide School Safety Summit that took place in January. The summit, which focused in part on how to respond to a safety crisis at school, brought in speakers from various areas of law enforcement, including the FBI, a Special Weapons and Tactics team and the attorney general's office.

Collins also is an educational adviser for the Texas School Resource Officer Association, director of the Pirate Precinct teen court and a co-sponsor of the Pine Tree High School Crime Stoppers. Collins also teaches government and economics. "I think that kind of speaks for itself," Quinn said.

Longview police officer Chris Bethard, a school resource officer for Pine Tree High School, nominated Collins for the award with the Safety Summit in mind.

"She was so instrumental in the summit," he said. "She came up with the idea and spearheaded the project, and it was a great asset to the teachers and to the community. It brought a form of training to our teachers I didn't think they had had before."

One of the most interesting parts of the summit was a presentation by police officers from Spokane, Wash., about their experience with a school shooting incident, Bethard said. "The more trained and the more prepared we are, the better we react when the situation happens," he said.

Though the officer hopes the district will never need to use the training from the summit, he said it was far better to be trained and not have an incident than the other way around. "It puts us a step ahead," he said.

Collins said she came up with the idea while watching the October 2006 national school safety summit on TV. "I just came in one day and said, 'I think we need to do this,' and so we sat down and got after it," she said, adding that the school administration was receptive to the idea.

Such training is essential for a district like Pine Tree, Collins said. "We're a very open campus here," she said of the high school. "We feel like it is important for all of us to be aware of our surroundings. When you come to school, you're kind of in a cocoon and you think nothing can happen to you.

"But you actually have people out there that will prey on schools, and not just elementary schools and preschools. And a lot of our kids are pretty naïve about it."

Collins also addresses the relationship between students and police officers. Her street law class, which covers topics such as searches and seizures, and the Crime Stoppers program are two ways she helps students foster a healthy communication with law enforcement officers.

Collins said her own interest in the legal system has fueled her desire to teach the subject. "We want the kids to understand that the police officer is there to help them," she said. "They have to feel comfortable to come to the police, and I think teachers need to feel this way too, because we're all supposed to be in this together."