

Dear Parent,

The tragic school shooting in Parkland, Florida continues to cause great pain throughout the nation and for many of us locally. Every incident in the growing number of school shootings is deeply troubling. The most recent traumatic event in Florida understandably prompts a range of questions for all of us and compels us to ask what more we can possibly do to help protect our students now and into the future. We will best meet these challenges before us by working together. This message is intended to help you understand all that we do to keep our students safe and to enlist your help in our work together.

In the following paragraphs, you will learn about an array of established safety measures. While each component is an essential part of a complete safety plan, the most effective safety measures will always reside in our people.

Our first priority and commitment is that any student who we identify to be a threat to the safety and security of our schools, will be removed from our schools. Students, parents and staff members most often have first access to concerning statements, actions or communications. We rely on each report of concern that people might encounter, and it is critically important that we encourage all students, parents and staff members to report any troubling comment, action or exchange.

Reporting Concerns

Students, parents and staff members can report any concern directly to a school administrator in person, via email or by phone call. Anyone can anonymously report a concerning incident on our websites via the Safety Concerns button. Our staff members actively monitor these submissions, and we review each report thoroughly. Each student's iPad device also has a quick link to report any safety concerns.

When we receive a report of any safety-related concern, we have teams of people trained and available to respond. Each school has teams of counselors, administrators, social workers and psychologists who are able to identify potential students of concern and to intervene. We are fortunate to have the immediate assistance of a local police officer on each high school campus, and our police department partners frequently provide additional police presence.

Partnership With Local Resources

When any student poses a risk to others, we draw upon a number of local resources, and we work in partnership with families in order to get the student to a safe place. With 12,000 students in our care, we are partners with many local agencies, including hospitals, crisis workers and therapists. Mental health issues have played a role in many past school tragedies, and responding effectively to students with mental health needs can make all the difference. In addition to working with local hospitals and doctors, the District operates several alternative schools where students can get needed intervention and assistance.

State Police Reporting

As required by law, in certain circumstances we report students to a database maintained by the Illinois State Police that becomes part of the review of any individual's request for a Firearm Owner's Identification Card. As a school district, we do not issue Firearm Owner's Identification Cards, nor do we make these determinations as to whether an individual should be prevented from obtaining one; however, we take our responsibility of reporting any potential safety risks seriously as we believe this can impact future events.

Police Presence

Each high school campus has an armed police officer on our campus during hours of operation. If an officer is away from the school for any reason, our local police departments have been excellent partners, and they provide another officer during the time the regularly assigned officer is off our campus. In addition, at the start and end of the school day, we routinely have a second officer on the school campus.

Safety Drills

The degree of simulated reality of the lockdown drills has advanced over the years. Our students and staff members have demonstrated conscientious commitment to these drills as they provide invaluable data to identify potential areas of vulnerability and improve our practices.

Our local police departments work closely with our school personnel to review our safety procedures, to design our lockdown drills and to conduct the lockdown drills. Though the state requires only one drill per school year, in District 211, for many years, we have conducted two lockdown drills each year in order to conduct one each semester.

Limited Access

We acknowledge that a potential intruder may not be a current or recent student. Our school buildings are large facilities with many doors leading to the outside. We limit access to our school buildings. Commonly, multiple staff members are assigned to those entrances that remain accessible during the school day to observe students and address visitors to the buildings. All other exterior access doors remain secured and monitored during the school day.

Supervision and Communication

Our group of student supervisors includes many former police officers, and all supervisors are trained to immediately report any individual of possible concern or suspicious activity. Our supervision staff and administrators are equipped with two-way communications equipment that allows instant communication throughout the building and with the police department. Our camera systems have undergone recent upgrades within each building. Camera surveillance coverage throughout our facilities is extensive, and our local police and fire departments have access to our cameras in our schools in the event of an emergency.

Working Together

Many parents, students and staff members have expressed a commitment to be involved in our work together to ensure that each school day is safe for our students and staff members. Foremost, we want to reiterate our reliance on you to report any potential matters of concern to an administrator. We received numerous messages from parents, and we value each message and suggestion, giving each consideration.

Connections to school personnel and the school community can make a difference for students. We encourage you to learn about our supportive student services resources, if you have ever wondered about assistance for your own son or daughter. For your own connection, we encourage you to join any of your school's parent groups, such as the Principal's Advisory Board or the Boosters, among others.

Unfortunately, the tragic school shooting in Parkland, Florida was only the latest in a series. We send our heartfelt care to all of these communities and to all the people associated with each of these schools. We are committed to working together with our students, parents and staff members to safeguard our highest and greatest priority – the safety and welfare of our students.

Sincerely,

Daniel E. Cates
Superintendent