

March 15, 2018

Dear Parents/Guardians:

As a district, we know that the safety of your children is your number one priority. Please know that the Fox Chapel Area School District shares that priority with you. Although we sent a letter in mid-February following the Parkland, Florida, tragedy, I'd like to follow up with some additional information about our safety protocols and procedures.

We are told by experts that one of the strongest ways to keep students safe and one of the best preventative measures to violence is to develop relationships with our students. All of our staff members really do a wonderful job with this. We also depend on the students to care about one another and to tell a trusted adult when a student is struggling, or when a student may need some extra help. When our students do need extra help, we have a variety of ways that we are able to offer assistance, including our school counselors; our MAPS (the University of Pittsburgh's Maximizing Adolescent Potentials program) employees who also serve as home-school liaisons; and behavior specialists. We also have other programs that offer support to students (such as the Student Assistance Program) who may be struggling with social or emotional issues. Additionally, we have a plethora of outside agencies that we can turn to when we need additional assistance.

As a district, we deliberately do not publish every detail of our safety plan as we feel that would make our schools more vulnerable to a person who might want to do harm to our children. However, we can tell you that we routinely review the lockdown procedures in every building and have gone over these procedures with our staff members. We have also done lockdown drills at each of our schools with our students. When we do these types of drills, please know that we always communicate with our students in an age-appropriate manner. Although we have placed a particular emphasis on these drills over the last two weeks, these are things that we have done in the past and that our staff members have been training for for years – all in the hopes that we never have to use this knowledge and training.

I'd also like to expound upon what I said in my last letter about the ALICE® Training. ALICE is active shooter response training and stands for Alert, Lockdown, Inform, Counter, and Evacuate. Besides every district staff member receiving that training earlier in the school year, we have one administrator in every school who has had in-depth training in the ALICE method. This method teaches how to best deal with an intruder based on the information that a person has at the time. These methods can include evacuating, barricading, or confronting. Our staff has had presentations on this method as well as follow-up drills.

Besides our relationships with our students, we have spent years building relationships with local law enforcement. District administrators routinely meet with the chiefs of police of the municipalities that make up the Fox Chapel Area School District. In fact, last week we held that meeting and we discussed the police having a much more visible presence in our schools. As our students develop relationships with school personnel, it is also essential that they develop relationships with local law enforcement officers. As a result of that discussion, please do not be surprised to see our local police in your child's school, especially at the beginning and end of the school day. But they have also been invited in at any time to walk the halls, eat lunch with our students, and to make their presence known. It's important that parents are aware as you may even see a police car parked in front of your child's school. As a part of that recent meeting with the police chiefs, we also spoke with them about our school safety measures and additional ways that we could make our children safer. We are very grateful to our local police departments for being willing to, along with us, do everything it takes to keep our students safe.

It is also important to note that, although we keep an eye on social media to the best our ability, we also need the help of our students in this area. Please urge your child(ren) to say something to a trusted adult if they see something concerning or that they feel needs to be addressed on social media.

In an effort to enhance the safety and security of our students and staff, the school district has established phone and email tip lines to enable parents and students to confidentially report any safety issues. If you have any concerns to report, please email tip@fcasd.edu, or call 412/696-1420.

In today's society, school safety is not something that can afford to wait. It's a priority that must be of utmost importance. Your trust in us and our school employees is not something we take lightly and we know that safety must be paramount.

Sincerely,

Gene Freeman, Ed.D.
Superintendent