

HUDSON CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

February 22, 2018

Dear Bluehawk Families,

As we return to school after winter break, we continue to process the senseless and horrific event that took place in Florida last week. Please know that the faculty, staff, administration, and Board of Education of the Hudson City School District consider the safety of our students as our utmost priority. Disturbing events such as these bring to the forefront the issue of school safety, so I wanted to take the time to assure you that we have detailed security features and plans in effect to protect our students and staff to the best of our ability. While we strive to keep your children safe, it is also important that we have open communication between the community and the schools.

Although, for added security, we do not publicly share all our safety efforts, I can tell you that our schools are locked during the school day and only visitors with legitimate reasons to be in our buildings are allowed to enter by way of locked and monitored entryways. Additionally, to ensure our students and staff know what to do in the event of an emergency, our schools practice multiple emergency drills throughout the year. We provide our staff with annual training for emergency situations, and we work closely with our School Resource Officer and other local law enforcement agencies to regularly review and update our safety policies and procedures.

In addition to our safety meetings and various drills practiced throughout the year, we are continuously reviewing and updating our safety policies and procedures as we receive information from law enforcement. No amount of review or practice is too much when it comes to the safety of our students and staff, and we will continue to review our plans to make sure that our schools are the absolute safest they can be.

It is important for parents to know that children of any age may be frightened or upset by these events. Your child may be experiencing significant feelings of fear, sadness, confusion, possibly even anger. You may want to give your children the opportunity to talk about these feelings. **Here are some helpful tips from the National Association of School Psychologists about what parents can do at times like this:**

- Make time to talk. Let their questions be your guide as to how much information to provide. Be patient. Children do not always talk about their feelings readily. If you choose to talk with your children about these events, ask questions to get their understanding of what happened. Questions like "What did you hear? What do you think?" or "What are you afraid of?" will allow you to identify any concerns and correct any misconceptions your child may have.
- Make sure your child understands it did not happen here, and that it is safe for them to go to school. Let your child know that the feelings he or she is experiencing are okay and that he or she is not alone in feeling this way.
- Keep your explanations developmentally appropriate:
 - *Early elementary school children* need brief, simple information that should be balanced with reassurances that their school and homes are safe and that adults are there to protect them.
 - *Upper elementary and early middle school children* will be more vocal in asking questions about whether they truly are safe and what is being done at school. They may need assistance separating reality from fantasy. Discuss efforts of school and community leaders to provide safe schools.
 - *Upper middle school and high school students* will have strong and varying opinions about the causes of violence. They will share concrete suggestions about how to make school safer and how to prevent tragedies in society. Emphasize the role that students have in maintaining safe schools by following school safety guidelines communicating any personal safety concerns to administrators and accessing support for emotional needs.

- Limit television or online viewing of these events and be aware if the television is on in common areas. Developmentally inappropriate information can cause anxiety or confusion, particularly in young children. Adults also need to be mindful of the content of conversations that they have with each other in front of children, even teenagers, and limit their exposure to hateful or angry comments that might be misunderstood.
- Review safety procedures. This should include procedures and safeguards at school and at home. Help children identify at least one adult at school and in the community to whom they go if they feel threatened or at risk.
- Use it as a teaching moment. A discussion about troubling events can lead to a conversation about helping others, such as donating to a relief organization or charitable event. There is bad in the world, but we all have the power to make it a better place.

As always, our school counselors are available to assist any child who may have difficulty coping with this disturbing news. There is also a great amount of useful information available online that can assist you in talking with your children about difficult subjects. If your child is experiencing mental health challenges, please do not hesitate to contact your child's principal or school counselor. We want to be a resource for you and your child and are available to assist in any way we can.

Please know that we take the safety of your children very seriously and we work each day to create a safe, positive environment for all of our students. In closing, I would like to remind you, and please remind your children of this as well, that if you "see something, say something." If you or your child suspect another individual is exhibiting signs of potentially violent behavior, or you become aware of threats or suspicious/unusual behaviors that could potentially pose a risk to our students or schools, please let the school or law enforcement know immediately. Together, we can work to prevent tragedies and keep our children safe.

Sincerely,



Dr. Maria Lagana Suttmeier, Superintendent
Hudson City School District