



**THE SCHOOL DISTRICT OF
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February 27, 2018

Dear Parents –

As we all continue to grieve the senseless loss of life of our Broward neighbors, I have received many messages of concern about the safety of our schools. Palm Beach County Schools has always made student safety a priority and funds one of the best school police departments in the State.

Our School Police Officers are armed, certified law enforcement officers with additional training to support students and schools with education, relationships, and in times of crisis, an all-out law enforcement response to an emergency. Rest assured, they are well trained for any type of response, including active shooter scenarios. I would like to take a moment to share some of the things we are doing at the District level to further secure and protect our campuses.

Campus Security

Although we regularly review safety plans, after the Parkland tragedy, I immediately asked Principals to review their safety protocols and procedures with their personnel and encouraged them to work with School Police to make any necessary and reasonable changes to their campuses to ensure security.

Principals also conducted a thorough assessment of their campuses with a checklist sent to them by the Operations Division. The Operations Division is reviewing and prioritizing all work orders related to the security of campuses including, but not limited to, locks, keys, faulty fences, the potential immediate need for temporary fencing, or other issues identified by the Principal. This process also includes reassessing projects under the umbrella of the penny sales tax to prioritize work dedicated to safety and security.

During the first week of April, a team of safety experts from large urban school districts across the country will be in Palm Beach County to study our systems and protocols and make any necessary recommendations for improvement. This is occurring simultaneously with the State Attorney's convening of a Grand Jury to assess multiple issues, including safety and security at our schools. We intend to review recommendations from these events to improve upon school security in all areas.

We are listening to your many concerns and suggestions about securing our schools to make it more difficult for individuals to walk onto campuses. Many of our schools are old buildings with outdoor areas designed long before schools became targets of violence. New schools will be designed with security as a priority. In the meantime, we are remedying the most apparent risks first and planning for additional safety in terms of more fencing, more cameras, more School Resource Officers, and more mental health support for students. However, these types of upgrades come with a significant requirement of funding.

The Governor's proposed budget is a step in the right direction, but it is not a done deal. It is important that you write your Legislators to encourage them to fully fund the Governor's proposal without taking funds from other areas. Funding for student safety cannot be a shell game, it has to be new and sustained funding over the coming years. A sample letter, as well as email addresses, for Legislators can be found at www.palmbeachschools.org/schoolsafety. Please take a moment to make these important asks of your elected officials.

Student Discipline and Social Media

In the midst of this tragedy, I am disappointed that some students chose to spread social media threats to our campuses. Let me be clear - students bringing weapons to campus or making threats against schools will face expulsion. I have shared the following with Principals:

Students who are involved in weapons-related incidents to include-social media posts with weapons, photos with weapons, weapons-related arrests/investigations by agencies, BB/Pellet Guns in conjunction with a threat, or any other object used as a weapon will face expulsion.

It is important that parents speak regularly with their child(ren) about the appropriate use of social media. Many of the students making these threats as 'jokes' will face serious consequences that have lasting implications. Moving forward, I am asking that students and other community members not share social media threats with others, but report them immediately to School Police at 561-434-8700.

You may have also heard that the Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office has arranged for students and parents in the County to have a new app called "Student Protect" - a platform for students to say something if they see something, anonymously and in real time.

I am told this app will be live in Google Play and Apple App Store soon and I believe it will be an additional tool for students to play a role in the safety of their campuses. Additionally, we are mobilizing the many community agencies that support our schools to provide additional mental health support to students and families in crisis. These resources can be accessed by contacting the School Counselor at your child(ren)'s school(s).

Student Advocacy

Watching our students walk off their campuses last week came with mixed emotions for all of us. I was proud of our students for being passionate enough to act, but very concerned about the safety issues that arise when students choose to leave campus. With that in mind, I have encouraged Principals to begin planning with their students who wish to recognize March 14 as a Day of Action.

This day has to be planned with safety as a priority. When students choose to leave the safety of their campuses, it strains our resources and forces School Police and the School Administration to divide their attention. Please speak to your child(ren) about the importance of staying on campus on March 14 and participating in advocacy activities planned at their school, as school administrators will not be able to supervise or escort students who leave campus.

I am so proud of the activities our students have already undertaken to support Broward County students. From notes of support, to personal letters, to monetary donations, our students continue to write a narrative for which their generation will be proud to reflect upon, despite the tumultuous times they must navigate.

I would also like to thank the Sheriff's Office and many Police Departments who have supported our schools during this time with additional patrols and officers on or around our campuses. Our conversations about student safety, support, and mental health will continue.

Thank you in advance for being engaged in the conversation and for your continued support of our School District.

Sincerely,



Robert M. Avossa, Ed.D.
Superintendent

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