

SCHOOL DISTRICT OF THE CHATHAMS

Note from the Superintendent

February 2018

Safety and Security

Dear Parent or Community Member,

It has been one week since the school shooting in Parkland, Florida. During this time I have received many emails and questions regarding school district security, and I would like to summarize some key informational points with you now.

First, you should know that each school in the district has an individualized safety and security plan that has been developed over time, in consultation with the Chatham Borough and Chatham Township Police Departments and with input from the Morris County Prosecutor's Office via a district-wide assessment completed in 2013 in partnership with that entity and the Department of Homeland Security. The safety and security plans are updated annually, and the chiefs of police and I meet to discuss them, as well as our Memorandum of Agreement—a legal document guiding the sharing of information between the district and police—each fall. Our plans and procedures have been developed over time based on the above interactions, as well as guidance from the New Jersey Department of Education, Morris County Office of Emergency Management, and other organizations.

The aforementioned organizations and experts recommend NOT sharing our safety and security plans with the community at large and also recommend NOT detailing particular aspects of our emergency response protocols with the broader public. However, I am able to reiterate and share with you some of the major upgrades to our security protocols that we have made within the past five years:

- Our schools conduct a minimum of two safety and security drills per month. These drills include simple evacuations, simulated active shooter events, lockdowns, shelter-in-place scenarios, and other kinds of simulations. The local police departments often participate in these drills and we debrief after them so that we learn from the experiences. We also make our schools available to the police departments for their own active shooter drills that they conduct with simulated ammunition and rounds from time to time when school is not in session.
- We instituted the A.L.I.C.E. response protocol two years ago. ALICE stands for Alert, Lockdown, Inform, Counter, and Evacuate. Two of our administrators and one of the Township Police officers attended formal ALICE training, then turn-keyed that training to the rest of the district. The idea behind ALICE is to empower teachers and students to react to an incident according to the circumstances: flee if it is possible, throw things at an intruder if it comes to that, lockdown if that is the only option, and so forth. A [New York Times article](#) about how to respond during a school shooting appeared this weekend, and it parallels the ALICE protocol.
- We have installed more than 400 security cameras throughout the district. The software to access these cameras is also installed in the Township and Borough police departments and in their patrol cars. District personnel are able to monitor these cameras in real time and also look at recorded footage.

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- We instituted a number of changes based on the Department of Homeland Security assessment in 2013. For example, we have numbered all of our rooms from the outside, secured unassigned lockers, placed in all rooms emergency kits that include food stuffs and a five gallon bucket that can be used as a makeshift bathroom in case we are locked down for multiple hours, placed new locks on doors like custodial closets and electrical panels, removed trees that could be used to access roofs, installed security gates so that we can section off the buildings for after-school activities, and more.
- We have hired full-time security personnel for each school building. These security monitors are all retired police officers and perform a variety of functions within each school.
- We have purchased additional tools to use during lockdowns to make classrooms more difficult to enter, even in the event that a lock is breached.
- We have partnered with the Morris County Office of Emergency Management to utilize a dynamic mapping software that the County can overlay over our building floor plans in order to direct emergency responders to any location in our building as quickly as possible.
- We have installed a swipe card system at each building so that we are able to keep doors locked during the school day and avoid lost or stolen keys that may be used to access the building inappropriately.

The above list is not all-encompassing and there is a much longer list of additional security precautions that we might consider as we make enhancements to our existing plans and protocols. This list might include items like armed police officers, modifications to building entrances, the use of new technologies to monitor entry points to buildings, and so forth. Our Board of Education will continue to consider additional security measures in the wake of recent school shootings across the country and the needs identified by law enforcement and school personnel, balancing the goal of greater security with what is reasonable and achievable in a school setting.

I would like to reiterate something I mentioned in an earlier message this week, which is that one critical component of any safe and secure environment is the commitment to supportive networks for students that allow them to be forthcoming with one another and with adults—reporting concerns and being an upstander. Working to achieve this aim is probably the simplest, most effective measure that every one of us can commit to immediately in order to build safer schools.

I thank you again for all of your kind messages of support over the past week.

Sincerely,

Mike LaSusa

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