

April 2018 Supt Message – School Safety Issues

Hello, my name is Mark Haag and it is my honor and privilege to serve as the Superintendent of the Lenawee Intermediate School District.

In light of recent events across our country, the safety and security of our students, staff and guests in our schools is front and center in the public's attention. Our hearts go out to the Parkland, Florida community and all others that have suffered such tragedies in the school setting. Unfortunately, horrible things go on across this country each and every day, but they seem even worse when it happens to children and in the school setting.

This is and has been the first priority for many of us in schools all along, unfortunately it sometimes takes tragedy to remind of us what is most important. All individuals need to feel safe and secure, especially for learning to occur in our schools. As public schools, we have this responsibility, and must maintain the confidence and trust of our parents and community.

In recent years, our schools have established strong partnerships with law enforcement and other first respondents. In addition, we work with other community partners who focus on the health, social and emotional needs of children and all in the community. These efforts are made in part to help prevent school shootings and other types of violence in our schools. Our schools in the district and across the county have participated in multiple trainings and drills focused on preventing situations and how to respond if we were to have a variety of emergency situations. These agencies have advised us on how to better secure our schools in a variety of ways using technology and in some cases schools have asked for specific funding for these purposes. For example, most buildings in our organization and schools that our staff work in across the county have limited access to buildings to single secured entries, added security cameras, and/or have modified windows and exterior doors to be impact resistant. We know students learn best in safe and secure environments.

We cannot keep our schools safe without the help and support of our entire community. We all can play a role, and I urge you to do so, to learn more about the warning signs associated with school shooters in the United States. They include violent fantasies, anger problems, fascination with weapons, being a loner, suicidal or homicidal ideation, stalking, excessive interest in previous shootings, paranoia, violence and cruelty, acting out, police contact, mental health issues, use of alcohol and drugs, and unusual interest in police, military and terrorist activities. Experts say a single warning sign by itself may not be significant, but together in a cluster of warning signs is much more serious.

We need to make sure that each child knows they must tell a trusted adult immediately if they feel their school is threatened in any way (and we know this is more of a challenge with some of the students we serve at LISD). This includes sharing information about weapons or threatening acts of violence in person or online. We also need to be purposeful in how we speak about these issues as adults with children and students, as there is a fine line between keeping the line of communications open with our students and creating further stress and anxiety over past events.

In addition, our children cope with the painful feelings that may be triggered by the tragedy in Florida last month and the ideas and questions that it may spur. One way here at school and at home is by making the time to ask them questions, listen and help them process by pointing out safeguards and what to do in an emergency, whether it occurs at school or home.

Recent events have also triggered some student demonstrations across the United States. This is not something that most public schools have had to deal with during the past 40-50 years, but there are legal guidelines we must follow.

If you have questions or concerns about this topic, or other matters, please feel free to contact me at 517-265-1628 or by email at mark.haag@lisd.us.