



Michael K. Ginalski
Superintendent of Schools

February 23, 2018

Dear Parents:

In the aftermath of the tragic event in Parkland, Florida last week many parents have reached out for reassurance that in Corning-Painted Post, we are doing everything humanly possible to keep our students safe. Because of this, we thought it would be appropriate to reach out to share specifics as to what efforts we have undertaken in the District in an effort to keep our buildings safe.

First, I have an unusual perspective on the issue. My own children were students at the former Southside High School in Elmira on February 14, 2001 when a student brought automatic rifles and bombs to school with the intention of committing an act of violence similar to what we have seen in Parkland. I remember vividly receiving the call that the students were being evacuated with no other information. Admittedly, I would not know that my then sophomore and senior at Southside were harmed or unharmed until I got to the reunification site at the then Elmira Free Academy. Remember, this was pre-social media and my kids did not have cell phones. I was an Assistant Principal at West High School at the time and it was the longest 30 minute drive of my life. So while none of us can relate to what parents are going through in Parkland, I can certainly relate to the terror as a parent you feel when you receive the call that there is an armed gunman in your child's school. So, with that in mind, you can trust that we take the safety of all in our buildings very seriously.

We have made a quantum leap in this area in the last ten years. For instance, in the last year I served as West High School Principal in 2005, we had zero cameras in our schools or on buses, no School Resource Officers, no Social Workers and frankly, safety plans and drills were lax at best. In the last ten years however, we have made dramatic strides. Our building infrastructure has improved significantly as we have addressed secure entrances to our buildings and have 300 plus cameras across the District. We have also moved to adopt the Raptor Ware system in each building which forces all new visitors to the building to scan their license to gain access. This has proven to be a very important piece of equipment as we have been able to stop sex offenders and individuals with outstanding arrest warrants from entering our buildings.

On the planning side, school safety is of the highest priority. Buildings are required to hold a minimum of 12 drills, with eight of the drills required before December 31st. We hold a variety of lockdown drills, based on various scenarios. All of our plans are developed in accordance with the New York State Guide to School Emergency Response Planning and are submitted and reviewed annually at the State level. Law enforcement is at the table with us as plans are developed and evaluated. I can say without hesitation that our relationship with law enforcement has never been stronger and all local police agencies including the New York State Police, Corning Police Department, Steuben County Sheriff's Department, the Painted Post Police Department and Steuben County Emergency Management are in constant contact with us. We also hold a Partners meeting led by Assistant Superintendent Jeffrey Delorme monthly where all local emergency management agencies are present as we discuss planning and issues we are encountering.

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On the personnel side, we currently have three School Resource Officers at the secondary level. Vincent Hill and Dennis Stebbins are at the High School and Mike Hess is at the Middle School. These individuals have proven to be invaluable to us and their presence definitely makes our buildings safer.

On the mental health side, we have added five Social Workers in addition to our School Counselors to work with our students who have various social and emotional needs. As we have stated numerous times this year, the number of students with mental health needs has increased significantly in recent years. Our people do a great job with students under duress who may be a threat to others. We routinely monitor and discuss these situations not only to provide support to the individual student but to keep everyone safe. This includes detailed threat assessments which allow us to know with conviction when students are a harm to themselves and others.

We have also hired Safe Havens International to conduct a complete assessment of our safety preparedness practices later this spring. We had an evaluation conducted by Van Harp & Associates prior to the move to the consolidated High School and Middle School in 2012 and it is time to have another assessment conducted. We recognize that our priorities need to evolve continually and having an outside agency evaluate our practices assures us of that. Safe Havens is the premier school safety organization in the United States. If there are holes in our planning and procedures, they will find it.

How can you help? We have stated on a number of occasions that the success of kids is based on the three legged stool concept with parents, school and community needing to work together to help kids be successful. Just like we say to our students, if you see something or hear something, please report it. Often times you have access to information that we do not, whether it is things you see on social media or hear from your children. Do not assume that we have access to that same information. Any tips or information you provide will be handled professionally and will remain confidential. But please, if you see something; please, please report it to your child's principal or my office. We take every tip very seriously.

While the event in Parkland could happen anywhere, we are very committed to doing all we can at our end to make our schools as safe as possible. In the end, I don't ever want any of you to receive the call that I received in 2001. We are doing everything humanly possible to ensure that never happens.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me directly. I am more than happy to discuss this issue with you. Society has changed and we need your help more than ever.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "MKG 2019". The signature is written in a cursive, somewhat stylized font.

Michael K. Ginalski
Superintendent of Schools

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