



FOREST HILLS PUBLIC SCHOOLS

6590 Cascade Road SE Grand Rapids, Michigan 49546 (616) 493-8800 Fax (616) 493-8552 www.flps.net

Daniel S. Behm, Superintendent

February 15, 2018

Dear Forest Hills Families,

Our thoughts and prayers are with the residents of Parkland, Florida, in the wake of the horrific shooting that occurred yesterday. These tragic events have everyone thinking about safety and security for our children and in our schools. The purpose of this letter is to communicate with you the steps Forest Hills Public Schools has taken over the years and our ongoing work related to student safety. This work falls into two broad categories: technical safeguards and human-centered care.

Technical Safeguards – For several years now, we have been working with our partners in law enforcement. Experts from the Michigan State Police, the Kent County Sheriff's Department, the Kent County Department of Emergency Management, local fire departments, and our local first responder community have all helped to develop our Emergency Operations Plan and provide training and consulting to our staff members. Like all training, this work is not a one-time event and requires continued practice and exercise. We set aside time to train and refine evidence-based practices in responding to emergencies in all of our schools. We are deeply grateful for the trained law enforcement personnel that regularly visit our schools and our permanent School Resource Officer, Kent County Sheriff Deputy Jim Svoboda.

While schools are vibrant and active facilities, there are common-sense safeguards that we have implemented over the years to increase the security of our buildings. With our community's support of the 2007 bond issue, we redesigned our school entrances to route all visitors through the office during school hours while locking all other entrances. Additionally, we operate a sophisticated system of internal and external cameras and sensors that monitor activity 24 hours a day. We have plans for additional physical safeguards with our upcoming bond proposal in November that include installing shatterproof glass and automated locking mechanisms in our entrance areas.

Human-Centered Care – Experts tell us the most important and effective prevention efforts involve how we care for one another as people. At the root of the vast majority of school and workplace shootings are alienation and unaddressed mental health needs. People do best when they are connected in healthy relationships with family, friends, and peers. All of our staff members play a role in ensuring that every child feels connected to school, cared for, and loved. When people feel disconnected from these groups, problems can begin to develop. This is why we have made substantial investments in mental health education and have added staff to help children and families at all levels who may have specific mental health needs. I am grateful for and proud of our K-12 counselors, mental health liaisons, student advocates, social workers, and security personnel who provide expert care to students and families every day. This human-centered approach begins with our fabulous teachers. They see our children every day and they speak up and intervene when something seems to be troubling a child. This approach extends to all of our staff members as our students interact with bus drivers, coaches, secretaries, office staff, classroom aides, food service workers, custodians, child care staff, recess and lunchtime aides, and our administrators.

As parents, family members, friends and neighbors, we all play an important role in supporting one another and speaking up when someone may be in need or when something does not seem quite right. Please never hesitate to reach out to any of our schools with any questions or concerns. You can reach us at 616-493-8800.

"All learners achieving individual potential"



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Additionally, we participate in the statewide “[OK2Say](#)” program where students can confidentially report anything that threatens their safety or the safety of others. Tips can be reported by dialing 855-565-2729 or 8-555-OK2SAY.

It is when we all do our part to help one another, support our neighbors, build stronger relationships, and stay in close contact that we strengthen the fibers of the fabric that holds together our community. Security consultants stress the vital importance of this human-centered work.

I know it is difficult to even contemplate these devastating acts of violence. We all struggle at times processing this as well as how we might talk to our children about these events. Included here are some links to resources that can assist you and your family.

[Talking to Children About Violence: Tips for Parents and Teachers](#), National Association of School Psychologists

[In the Aftermath of a Shooting; Help Your Children Manage Distress](#), American Psychological Association

[Discussing Difficult Situations with Your Children](#), National Parent Teacher Association (PTA)

The safety and security of children will always be our top priority and our work in this area will never cease. We are always open to recommendations on how we can improve, and we look forward to our continued work with experts in this field. If you have questions or suggestions, please do not hesitate to contact me or your child’s principal.

With deep appreciation,

Dan Behm
Superintendent of Schools