



February 26, 2018

INSTRUCTIONAL EXCELLENCE

School and student safety

I was a high school principal at a school south of Denver when the Columbine High School shooting took place. Although there had been school shootings in the past, the events at Columbine changed forever how we think, act, and address school safety. I remember standing in the lobby of our school the next morning with the urge to hug each student that came through the door. I wanted to tell them how much I cared about them, and that all of us in the school would protect them. That day, almost 20 years ago, was a day that we will never forget.

We have learned a great deal about school safety and prevention over these many years, but, sadly, as was demonstrated again in Florida recently, we still have much to do to ensure we completely eliminate the potential of violent acts being perpetuated in our schools. As the superintendent I, along with our entire staff, put the safety and well-being of our students as our number one priority. There are many things that take place on a yearly basis to address and enhance our school safety plans. There are also many programs and protocols we have in place to help identify students in need of support, and help to ensure we address potential problems early. Due to recent events, I have had many questions asked of me regarding what we are doing to keep kids safe.

All of our schools have school emergency safety plans, developed in coordination with our district Emergency Preparedness and Safety Coordinator. We also work closely with our law enforcement agencies, who review our procedures and protocols, and guide us in the implementation of our most current safety practices. Some of these practices include secured entrances and security cameras in all of our schools and a School Resource Officer assigned to all of our secondary schools. We are fortunate to have a great partnership with our local law enforcement community, and they have been invaluable to the development and implementation of our plans. The plans are reviewed on a yearly basis, and, as needed, when new information is available.

In terms of support for students who are struggling with social-emotional issues, we have psychologists and social workers in our elementary schools, and counselors and psychologists at our secondary schools, who assist our student support teams to identify students in need. Our strategic plan is focused on creating a positive culture and climate and personalizing the educational experience for all students. The main goal of our personalization objective is to implement strategies to get to know our students on a personal level. We want to deeply understand their individual strengths, challenges, and future hopes and dreams. By knowing students well, we are also able to quickly identify when something is wrong.

Once something takes place, such as a threat that warrants an investigation and potential discipline, we work closely with our law enforcement agencies, and other experts, to help



Column by Superintendent Keith Jacobus, Ph.D.

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us determine the credibility and level of concern. Because of strict student data privacy issues, we are not allowed to communicate the specifics of a situation, or any consequences given, but know we take every perceived or potential threat very seriously and do our due diligence to follow through.

As a parent myself, I fully understand the concerns and questions brought to me and will continue to take every measure we can to protect our students. This includes evaluating our current security systems in place, and discussing where there are areas we can improve. We are also committed to working with our elected officials, and leaders outside of our schools, to develop policies and programs to help keep our schools' safe. Our end goal is to create a welcoming atmosphere, where our students feel supported and comfortable while learning, but, most of all, safe.

We will continue to provide as much information as possible about these efforts, to the extent that we can, and appreciate the community's support and partnership around the safety of our students.