



St. James R-1 School District

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March 1, 2018

Dear St. James R-I School District families,

On Tuesday, February 27, our school district was faced with a difficult situation. A student at the high school, in a moment of frustration, made a threat against the school. When informed of the threat, our building principal removed the student from the classroom and brought him to the office. We contacted local law enforcement who also questioned the student. Although both the high school and law enforcement have taken disciplinary and legal action respectively, both were also satisfied after extensive questioning that the student's threat was not genuinely meant to be carried out. I would like to reiterate that no students or teachers were ever in danger. We will always error on the side of safety given our present circumstances.

We live in a time when any threat to our students, staff or schools must be taken seriously, and we reacted to this recent matter accordingly. We also live in a time when incidents can be picked up by social media in seconds, before the full story is known, and transmitted via Facebook, Twitter and other similar forms. This can easily lead to anxiety, confusion and frustration both during the event and once it has been investigated.

It is the role of the schools, working with local law enforcement, to assure student safety. If a threat is made, there is protocol followed that allows us to get to the heart of the threat, and it would clearly be unwise for the district to report specifics before having all the facts. Such was the case on Tuesday.

Earlier this week a letter was sent to all staff regarding our protocols for keeping our schools safe, but there was something missing from that letter – a thorough account of communication procedures for different safety scenarios. Working with our staff, law enforcement, and parents, we will improve these protocols to ensure we do a better job of communicating matters of student safety going forward.

Finally, please remember that keeping our schools and our community safe requires all of us to be diligent. We ask that anything you hear of concern be shared with local law enforcement and school officials immediately.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Merlyn Johnson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent "M" and "J".

Merlyn Johnson
Superintendent of Schools

**St. James R-I School District
Security for Facilities,
Procedures and Personnel**

February 27, 2018

Dear Staff,

I recently sat down with Chief Ron Jones and School Resource Officer (SRO), Tony Gray. We discussed the recent situation in Parkland, Florida and all of the shared concerns from school districts across the nation. We discussed our present state of district security and reviewed our Crisis Management Plan. As superintendent, I can assure you the district has taken numerous steps over the past several years to enhance our building security. I have the utmost confidence in the level of dedication, training, and professionalism of our local law enforcement. Their constant communication and visibility at our school is noticed and appreciated by all. Through these constant discussions, we are empowered to take steps to keep our children safe, but we also live with the stark reality that we can't guarantee that the unimaginable will never happen in our community. Please know the work is never done. There is no finish line and it will never be "good enough." Our practices and procedures are fluid . . . we live with an aim to improve every single day.

Below please find a (talking points) synopsis of our security efforts. I hope it provides you with what you need regarding district safety should you be questioned about district efforts. As always, you can direct any inquiry to us and we would be happy to answer any questions.

Whether it is weather related or human initiated, anytime school security issues arise we take stock in what procedures we have in place and how we can improve. We have a very positive and productive relationship with our first responders. We are a partner with the St. James Police Department, Highway Patrol, and our four county sheriff offices. All of these organizations assist the District in many ways and provide us feedback on how to improve our safety processes.

Before and during the school year we utilize professional development days dedicated to safety training and drills with our first responders. This is in addition to the building level training exercises. These days both assist us in preventing potential events and prepare us if a situation takes place. Preparing for the unthinkable saves lives, training is essential. The SJPD also trains in our buildings to ensure familiarity. That effort is fluid, ever-changing and ongoing.

There are some steps we've taken that are part of our emergency planning that we simply do not share with the public. Our emergency plans are purposefully not subject to public record laws – this is for the protection of everyone involved. We adhere to recommendations from local law enforcement and the Department of Homeland Security.

Facilities (doors, windows, cameras, fencing, lighting, office configuration, improvements and new construction etc.)

- Keep all access doors locked
- Keep all classroom doors locked

- Continue to enhance networked Security Camera System – Remote access with SJPD access
- Enhance badge pass access to buildings (i.e. buzzer, card activated)
- Emergency kits (whistle, bandages, flashlights, class roster, etc.)
- Assess campus perimeter needs (playgrounds, general campus)

Procedures (Prevention, Planning, Response)

- Review our existing visitor check- in processes and building access
- Add communication systems (handheld radio system)
 - Presently in discussions with SJPD about acquiring handheld radio system for each building
- Review sporting events and other evening activity evacuation plans
- Provide updated and ongoing Active Shooter Training for the Staff, while maintaining focus on all emergency training.
- Ongoing age-appropriate training for students
- Update emergency procedures through Crisis Management Plan and feedback from law enforcement and the Department of Homeland Security.

Personnel (SRO, Staff, etc.)

- Increased visibility / local police officers and SRO in buildings & events
- Four A.L.I.C.E. trained instructors (SRO and SJPD staff)
- Continue to support programs that enhance patrols and positive police interaction with our schools
- We must continue to be strategic at all grade levels in building positive relationships with our students. We must be intentional in seeing that they feel connected to a caring adult(s).
- Post “Virtual Comment Box” for students and staff to easily access a QR Code to provide anonymous information to District SRO. We must listen to the young people in our district and encourage them to reach out if they know someone who needs help.

It takes **all of us** to keep young people safe; our partnership with the St. James Police Department, Fire and Rescue, Sheriff and State Highway Patrol, is essential in keeping our students safe. I can’t imagine having stronger and more trusted partners than we have in St. James.

As an educational leader, I wish there were a single answer. I pray each day for the safety of our community, our schools, and our students.

Sincerely,



Merlyn Johnson