

An Open Message to our Danbury Community from Dr. Sal Pascarella, Superintendent Regarding School Safety

Since last week's shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, we all remain sullen and saddened, while at the same time moved to ever increasing vigilance for the safety of our own students. As neighbors to Newtown, our community is too familiar with the impact that this senseless tragedy has on all of us -- adults and children, teachers and students. Never has it been more important that our schools remain a symbol of strength and unity in our community. Our community, like others across the country, will continue to rally around the Parkland community as they struggle to recover.

Violent events like this are profoundly disturbing for our students, families and staff, particularly for those who have personal and family ties to Newtown. Since last week, across our District, our mental health counselors, social workers and school psychologists have worked to support all of those who struggle in the days, weeks and months that follow the events in Parkland. As you talk to your children at home, you may find helpful tips from this [online resource](#) (see below) from the National Association of School Psychologists. Our administrators, teachers and staff are keeping a close eye on our children, providing needed support while also validating the security procedures we have in place, from oversight of school building security, including our safety advocates, to ensuring that safety drills and protocols, such as fire, weather drills and lockdowns, maintain our commitment to an effective response to any potential crisis. I have worked together with Mayor Boughton to heighten visibility of our community police during the school day, in order to reassure our community of our vigilance and to be prepared for an effective and immediate response to any unexpected events. We continue our strong partnerships with law enforcement, fire and rescue agencies, as well as with local and regional mental health, crisis and social service organizations. This week, I have also asked our Danbury Police Commanders to meet with our principals to discuss the Parkland tragedy, to review safety plans to determine whether any modifications or adjustments are necessary, and to assess whether our teams would benefit from additional crisis training. Student and staff safety is our top priority as we maintain our vigilance in following our safety and security protocols. The Board of Education and the City have been investing dollars over the years from state approved bonds to enhance safety and security of our schools. Some of these improvements have been new doors, windows, panic buttons, two way radios, safety advocates, cameras and guest controlled entries at each school to prevent the intrusion of unwanted individuals on our campuses.

As we turn to our goal of a strong finish to this school year, we must also consider the way in which we can support school safety and the many voices of our community. Reinforcing our students' roles in contributing to their school community through our "Say Something" and "Start with Hello" Programs, we have focused our students' attention on their interactions with all of their peers, with the purpose of strengthening bonds and connections for all students to their school community, and reporting concerns to trusted adults. As our students and adults in our community find a voice in the broader, national dialogue on the issue of violence in schools, we are preparing for a peaceful student action day at our secondary schools, to occur in March. I believe that giving our students a forum for peaceful and respectful expression is at the core of our educational mission in Danbury.

In the days and weeks to follow, I hope that you will join me in keeping the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School families in your thoughts and prayers. Thank you for your continued support of our children, our school communities, and our educational mission.

Dr. Sal

Online resources:

<https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources/school-safety-and-crisis/talking-to-children-about-violence-tips-for-parents-and-teachers>

<https://youth.gov/feature-article/federal-resources-helping-youth-cope-after-school-shooting>