

March 8, 2018

Dear parents, guardians, and community members:

During the past few weeks, our school district as well as many across the nation, have faced difficult conversations with students about their safety. The past few weeks have been one of the most unsettling times in my twenty-five-year career as an educator. Daily, I reflect on the status of our country and community at large. Our attempts to understand the senseless loss of lives is difficult.

Please know that the students' safety, well-being and security are our number one priority. We continue to work with our School Resource Officer, Matthew Ware, and our local law enforcement leaders to make every school as safe as possible. We strictly enforce the NYS SAFE act which prohibits guns on any school property unless you are a law enforcement officer. We also conduct multiple drills each year to ensure that both staff and students are best prepared for any situation should it ever arise. We continually refine our safety plans and protocols and look at ways we can improve our safety procedures. Additionally, we continue to work with local law enforcement officials to address any unsettling rumors and leads that may include social media posts or any other comments that may be perceived as threats.

Most recently our conversations have revolved around how our parents and community can assist in making our schools safer. As a community, we need everyone to work together to ensure our schools remain safe. This type of collaborative effort will help bring about the safest environment possible. Here are a few things that anyone in our community can do to assist us:

- When you see something or hear about something, say something and contact law enforcement. We ask that you either contact law enforcement and/or school officials with any rumors or potential information instead of posting this information on social media.
- Contact school administrators to ask questions about safety procedures if you have questions.
- When you enter school buildings, do not hold the door open for the person behind you and encourage your students to never let an adult into the school from exterior doors; instead, students should seek a staff member to assist visitors.
- Do not park in the emergency parking areas, such as the front circles at the High School and Middle School. These locations are set aside to allow our local law enforcement and/or firefighters to enter the buildings as quickly as possible if needed.
- Stress that making a threat is not to be taken lightly and that there are serious consequences that can include criminal charges and disciplinary measures.
- Monitor your child's social media accounts and phone/texting activity. Know what websites and social media sites your child is using. Look at what they are posting and who they are following.
- Talk with your child about recent local and national incidents. Explain that feelings such as sadness, anger, disappointment, and fear can be normal responses to tragedies for children and adults.
- Watch for changes in behavior and seek help if your child needs assistance dealing with anxiety or feeling safe.

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- o Keep an open line of communication with your children and encourage them to tell you or another trusted adult if they become aware of a threat or rumor of violence.

We also have been asked how parents can support their children. Below you will find links to websites that may be helpful.

Talking to Kids about School Safety

<http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/conditions/talking-kids-about-school-safety>

Talking to Children about Violence: tips for Parents and Teachers

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

Report to Parents- Helping kids cope with Tragedy

[https://www.naesp.org/sites/default/files/resources/2/Report to Parents/2005/rtp11-05.pdf](https://www.naesp.org/sites/default/files/resources/2/Report%20to%20Parents/2005/rtp11-05.pdf)

School counselors and administrators can be found at the following phone numbers if you need assistance with your child:

Oneida High School- 315-363-6901

Otto Shortell Middle School- 315-363-1050

Durhamville Elementary- 315-363-8065

North Broad Elementary-315-363-3650

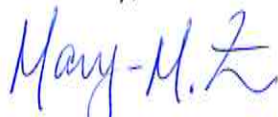
Seneca Street Elementary-315-363-3930

Willard Prior Elementary-315-363-2190

Working together at school and at home, we can make a difference for our children and our school community. As a school, we have no greater responsibility than to provide a safe environment where our children can learn and grow without excessive fear and anxiety.

I encourage you to have meaningful conversations with your children regarding these important topics. Please keep in mind that building administrators and school counseling teams are available to you and your students.

Sincerely,



Mary-Margaret Zehr
Superintendent of Schools