



SCARSDALE
PUBLIC SCHOOLS

'Dale Dispatch: District e-Newsletter Special Issue: Safety and Security

IN THIS ISSUE (February 28, 2018)

Superintendent's Message (Dr. Thomas Hagerman)

From Dr. Thomas Hagerman

Superintendent of Schools

On Safety and Security In the Scarsdale Schools



Dear Scarsdale Community,

Since our return from break there has been ample evidence to suggest that many within our schools and Village are still struggling with the horrific tragedy in Parkland, Florida. I know that I speak for our entire community when I say that we are grieving for the Stoneman Douglas High School students, staff, and families as their school reopens this week.

In addition to grief, events such as this also inspire a host of other emotions, including anxiety and fear. I want to take a moment to remind the entire community of our unwavering commitment to the safety and security of our students, staff, parents, and broader community. This commitment takes many forms. We have policies and procedures in place to protect our schools from a variety of threats, ranging from fires to flu. We have District and Building Safety Committees that meet regularly and debrief on both major and minor issues; conduct emergency drills of many sorts; respond to teacher and parent concerns; and plan for potential, larger scale issues. We also have outstanding administrators and counseling staff who are prepared and equipped to support students through a wide range of social and emotional issues, including peer conflicts; family issues, such as separation/divorce; stress in its many forms; and appropriate decision-making, to name a few. Moreover, we have a number of community supports that help us navigate a host of difficult issues, including the Scarsdale Edgemont Family Counseling Service and our outstanding Village Police and Fire Departments. It is worth noting in particular that Village Police Officers perform, unannounced, random walk-throughs of all seven school buildings in the District on a regular basis.

However, even with our best intentions, planning, and supports, we recognize the potential for larger scale threats to our local school community, so I would also like to discuss some of the more macro-level work in which we are engaged.

First, the District maintains and regularly updates its Safety and Emergency Management Plan. The purpose of this plan is outlined in its opening statement: "Emergencies in schools are defined as undesirable events that occur and have the potential to cause injury or illness to members of our school community or disrupt the orderly educational process. They range from acts of bullying or harassment to catastrophic natural or man-made events. Emergency management is the discipline of dealing with and avoiding risks...Emergency management in our schools is the continuous process by which our staff, students, administrators, parents, school groups, emergency responders, and our community manages hazards in an effort to avoid or mitigate the impact of disasters resulting from hazards. Preventative measures and good planning will reduce the likelihood that emergencies will occur and allow us to address those that do in an expeditious and effective manner...These plans also facilitate the coordination of the District with local and county plans and resources when incidents and emergencies occur. The district-wide plan is responsive to the needs of all schools in the District and is consistent with the more detailed school emergency plans required at the building level." The plan outlines:

Risk Reduction/Prevention and Intervention, Response Notification and Activation, and Recovery Methods, including mental health services. The plan in its entirety may be found [here](#).

Second, in an effort to be proactive in our approach to safety, the District contracted with Altaris, a K-12 safety, security, and emergency management firm, in 2016. Altaris has been actively working with each of our schools and District administration on the following goals:

- Reinforcing the District's current strong points and best practices;
- Identifying and mitigating any critical infrastructure hazards, loopholes, and vulnerabilities;
- Reviewing and revising District emergency plans, policies, procedures, and emergency response teams;
- Helping the District to prioritize prevention and mitigation measures so low and no-cost measures may be implemented immediately while the District develops long-range financial plans for larger projects;
- Providing ongoing role-specific training to all employees to develop their ability to prevent and manage emergencies in their buildings; and
- Providing 24/7, 365-day consulting support for all safety, security, and emergency management issues.

Altaris is collaborating with the District in three key areas:

- Preparedness and Prevention - The best response to a critical incident is preventing it from happening when possible. Altaris works with each of our schools to refine prevention and threat assessment procedures. A key ingredient is to maintain open lines of communication between students, staff, and parents to identify warning signs of violence or students in crisis. Altaris consultants perform annual assessments of all school buildings during regular school days. This allows their team to observe visitor management, student movement and normal school operations to identify any safety gaps.
- Emergency Response - The District utilizes numerous emergency procedures to ensure efficient management of any critical incidents that may occur. Altaris has completed comprehensive training with administrators and school emergency response teams. Teams continue to participate in realistic bi-annual tabletop exercises facilitated by Altaris consultants. The exercises are built around their respective schools and allow key school personnel to develop a high level of confidence and proficiency in managing critical incidents in their building when necessary.
- Post-Incident Recovery - In the wake of a critical incident, the District must be prepared to effectively manage stakeholder communications, reunify students directly with parents, and have solid contingency plans in place for resuming the business of education. Altaris continues to guide the District through the complex processes of parent reunification, public communication, and continuity of operations.

Altaris attends District Safety Team meetings to brief members on current safety and security

trends as well as provide updates on building level team meetings. Improvement opportunities identified during assessments and building level team meetings are discussed for consideration for uniform implementation District-wide.

In fact, the District has made tremendous progress over the past several years in enhancing safety, security, and emergency preparedness. The following are some of the improvements that have been instituted since 2016: single, limited points of entry at each of our schools; portable radios for every administrator and other select staff; extensive Public Address system upgrades; electronic card access control systems for doors; landscaping hazard mitigation (to improve sight lines, and to deter concealment); exterior lighting enhancements; and evacuation drill improvements, to name a few. Additionally other improvements are being considered which were identified as part of a comprehensive District Security Audit. This information will not be made public due to its sensitive nature; however, the District-wide, Emergency Response Team (DERT) will be using it to prioritize recommendations for the Board of Education's consideration and funding of ongoing improvements.

Third, and with a tremendous "thank you" for your support, this past February 8th, the community approved a \$65 million bond, which included significant funding earmarked for safety and security items, including security vestibules at each of our elementary schools, and security camera enhancements at all of our school sites. This bond will ensure even safer entry points to our schools and greater surveillance abilities throughout the District. Moreover, approval of the bond also alleviated burdens on the annual budget, giving us greater flexibility to make other safety and security enhancements possible.

While much of the information I have discussed thus far is about improving the physical school environment, much of the potential harm at schools lies with the behaviors of people. In a report entitled, **THE FINAL REPORT AND FINDINGS OF THE SAFE SCHOOL INITIATIVE: IMPLICATIONS FOR THE PREVENTION OF SCHOOL ATTACKS IN THE UNITED STATES**, co-authored by the Secret Service and US Department of Education, there are some disturbing findings:

- Incidents of targeted violence at school rarely are sudden, impulsive acts.
- Prior to most incidents, other people knew about the attacker's idea and/or plan to attack.
- Most attackers did not threaten their targets directly prior to advancing the attack.
- There is no accurate or useful profile of students who engaged in targeted school violence.
- Most attackers engaged in some behavior prior to the incident that caused others concern or indicated a need for help.
- Most attackers had difficulty coping with significant losses or personal failures. Moreover, many had considered or attempted suicide.
- Many attackers felt bullied, persecuted, or injured by others prior to the attack.
- Most attackers had access to and had used weapons prior to the attack.
- In many cases, other students were involved in some capacity.
- Despite prompt law enforcement responses, most shooting incidents were stopped by means other than law enforcement intervention.

So what implications do these findings have for Scarsdale schools? First and foremost, we must work together, support one another's efforts around this issue, and maintain open lines of communication. Beyond this, here are some recommendations for preventing harm in our schools:

- We must all hold the common belief that schools can and should be safe spaces at all times, and that much harm is preventable with appropriate planning and support.
- We must all ensure that our schools are places that are warm and welcoming for everyone, and filled with supportive and caring adults.
- We must all implore those with credible information about a threat to our schools to report this information to school staff and/or law enforcement and trust that it will be treated with the appropriate sensitivity and follow-through.
- We must all be watchful of children and adults who seem chronically hopeless or in despair.
- We must all reject bullying and harassment in all its forms.
- We must all prevent students from having unsupervised access to weapons, and ensure that

adults do not bring weapons into our schools at any time.

- We must all stay aware of our surroundings and share concerns about hazards with District personnel.
- We must continue to build on our preventative measures, and ensure that we are prepared for all types of potential threats.

We must all share the responsibility to keep our schools, homes, and community safe!

Warm regards,
Dr. Thomas Hagerman



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Scarsdale District Office
2 Brewster Road
Scarsdale, NY
(914) 721-2525