

Special Community Update

March 2, 2018

Last Friday I sent out a regular update to our community, but I thought it important to send a special one this week in order to address school safety. I have not fielded many questions from the community since the tragedy struck Florida – I hope this means that you continue to trust the job we do in keeping your children safe. However, I also know that while the questions may not have been asked that doesn't mean they haven't crossed your mind. It's important that you know what we've done and are continuing to do to ensure our children are as safe as possible.

As I reflected on the current environment across the nation I was reminded of a quote by Martin Luther King, Jr.:

Rarely do we find men who willingly engage in hard, solid thinking. There is an almost universal quest for easy answers and half-baked solutions. Nothing pains some people more than having to think.

The quote elicits a reflection on the fear many people may have about what is besieging schools. It is commonplace to send your children to school every day – what is not commonplace, though, is to have to wonder and fear whether something may happen to them. It is not an easy topic to discuss, nor are the answers to this problem simple. We can't (and shouldn't) build schools into prisons. Even the most hardened lines of security can be thwarted. We can't, frankly, foresee every possible evil that might come our way. So what is the answer? Another quote, from Theodore Roosevelt, provides a path for us to consider:

In any moment of decision the best thing you can do is the right thing, the next best thing is the wrong thing, and the worst thing you can do is nothing.

In this case, though, I would argue that we are left with only two options – do the right thing or do nothing, because when it comes to children's lives a wrong solution is not an option (and, frankly, doing nothing is just as unacceptable). The right, or best, option is to prevent violence from happening. Cory-Rawson is, arguably, better suited than many schools to do this because our school size allows us to facilitate building relationships with kids. As author Witter Bynner noted:

The biggest problem in the world could have been solved when it was small.

Perhaps some of these tragedies could have been avoided by someone reaching out to a student who felt like they were alone and lost. Our Principals, Heath Huffman (high school) and Becky Rosenbauer (elementary) will discuss in their forthcoming newsletters how our staff and administration take great pride in building relationships with kids. Even more significantly, we take even more pride in knowing that our student body is inviting to all walks-of-life and our kids go out of their way to connect with others. These tragedies occur when students feel alone and believe that there is no one to reach out to or that no one will listen. By building these relationships and trust with our students we can work to proactively prevent such horrific events.

Even while I write that we work to proactively avoid tragedy, we cannot ignore the possibility it may happen. So, in this case, per Teddy Roosevelt's quote, the next best option is to plan for and practice how we will react. It is foolish to believe that we will rise to the level of heroic acts without having practiced how we will respond. In the past few years the Ohio Department of Education and Homeland Security have required that schools meet annually with local police, fire, and other emergency management personnel to review and discuss their safety plans. Cory-Rawson was doing this long before it was a requirement because we know that these individuals are an invaluable resource in improving our safety plan. Going beyond the safety plan and, thanks to this cooperation, we were able to work with the Hancock County Sheriff to add another School Resource Officer a few years ago to help provide an additional presence in the schools. Our school resource officer, Deputy Sheets, believes his best tool in preventing a tragedy is not his firearm, nor his handcuffs, or his police cruiser – it is his ability to connect with kids and build the very type of relationships I discussed above.

We are continually reviewing and reflecting upon our school safety plan and questioning whether it can be improved. In fact, the most recent events have caused us to reconsider how we go about our morning routine with students before the start of school. We identified an area of concern in the elementary and Mrs. Rosenbauer has worked with her staff and will be sending out communication to elementary parents to outline the changes to the morning routine for students, staff, and parents.

I've always said that our primary job is not to educate students; rather, it is to keep them safe so they can learn in a productive environment. For schools across the nation this takes on various meanings – in some it may, frankly, mean that school is the safest place for students because their time outside of school is fraught with danger. For our school I believe it means that “your” children are treated like “our” children with the expectation that they are as safe, if not safer, here at school than anywhere else. Regardless of the location, though, if students do not feel safe they cannot focus on learning. While we may not be able to foresee every evil in the world, please know that we are continually working to provide the safest possible environment for our children.