



February 21, 2018

Dear Hampton Roads Families:

Following last week's school shooting in Florida, we all have experienced a wide range of emotions from shock and sorrow to anger that something like this could happen. Schools are a place where children deserve to learn free from fear.

The responsibility of keeping our schools safe belongs to everyone. In these times of heightened awareness, schools, parents, staff and the community at-large must remain ever vigilant in our efforts.

As you know, we have many security measures in place in our schools across Hampton Roads. In addition, as superintendents of the region, we are joining together with local police agencies to address disturbing social media posts or comments made that could be perceived as a threat. Any threat made against any one of our schools – even those made “as a joke” – will have serious repercussions, including potential criminal charges and a possible recommendation for expulsion from school.

We are reinforcing this message with students and we need your help at home. We all have a responsibility to treat information regarding school safety with caution; the oversharing of misinformation in most cases will create problems, not prevent them. We ask that any social media or other threat be reported directly to law enforcement and school officials, rather than shared through social media channels. Quite simply, if you hear or see something, say something.

We also encourage parents and caregivers to monitor students' online activity and to employ these strategies:

- Know what websites and social media sites your child is using. Look at what they are posting and who they are following.
- Stress that making a threat is not to be taken lightly and that there are severe consequences.
- 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.
- Contact your child's school and law enforcement if you believe your child is capable of making a threat and following through.
- 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.

Working together at school and at home, we can and will make a difference for our children and our community. You place your trust in us each and every day. As superintendents, we have no greater responsibility than to educate our children in a safe environment where they can learn and grow, without carrying the weight of fear and anxiety on their shoulders.

Thank you in advance for partnering with us in this important work and for your assistance in keeping our children and communities safe.

Sincerely,

Dr. James Roberts, Chesapeake Public Schools Superintendent

Dr. Jennifer Parrish, Poquoson City Public Schools Superintendent

Ms. Tamara Sterling, Franklin City Public Schools Superintendent

Dr. Elie Bracy, III, Portsmouth Public Schools Superintendent

Dr. Jeffery Smith, Hampton City Schools Superintendent

Dr. Deran Whitney, Suffolk Public Schools Superintendent

Mr. Brian Nichols, Newport News Public Schools
Acting Superintendent

Dr. Aaron Spence, Virginia Beach City Public Schools Superintendent

Dr. Melinda J. Boone, Norfolk Public Schools Superintendent

Dr. Olwen Herron, Williamsburg-James City County Schools
Superintendent