

Somerville Public Schools

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Dear Parents/Guardians,

As a school district, we acknowledge and understand that this week has been a difficult time for our students, parents, staff, and community as a whole. We continue to have counselors available for students and staff who would benefit from the support services our mental health professionals provide. For any parent or community member that would benefit from meeting with our mental health professionals, we welcome providing support to you, as well. It is normal for all of us to be nervous and scared, especially in this time in which we are living and especially when confronted with unknown and perceived threats

The initial four (events 1- 4) and two subsequent cases (events 5 and 6) of this week have all been fully investigated. Events 5 and 6 were the result of people combining parts of the first four events and not on any facts or evidence. Individuals participated in either talking, texting, or posting about what they had heard or read from others. There is no evidence that a list of targeted individuals exists. There is no evidence that a planned attack exists.

Many hours and resources were spent speaking to individuals that had heard a story from friends. These friends heard it from others, who heard it from others, and so on. The last of the initial four cases (event 4) was the result of someone misreading a social media comment about the things currently going on with the first three cases at Somerville High School. For the initial three cases, all involved individuals have been identified and interviewed. The investigators are fully aware of all facts of each event and used those facts in making the determination that the cases were not credible.

Although it may be difficult to believe, none of the cases were connected to each other. The only ways these cases are connected is that the involved individuals made incredibly poor choices. So, to reiterate, the threats were deemed not credible. A threat deemed not credible does not mean that the individuals did not make inappropriate choices in their words and posts. As a result, each participant has received disciplinary measures in accordance with the student handbook, district policy, and law.

When a concern is brought to the attention of school personnel or is discovered through routine screening of student emails, visited websites, files, or social media posts, the administration initiates an investigation. When necessary, we involve the Somerville

Police Department to fully investigate the identified concern. Investigations may include, but are not limited to a search of all accounts, court orders of phone records, interviews with witnesses, interviews with the accused, searches of homes/business/lockers/etc., and review of video and audio recordings. The police work in collaboration with the Prosecutor's Office to determine if criminal charges should be levied.

Throughout the process, the school district provides information, but is limited in what can and cannot be shared due to privacy laws. Furthermore, the district follows the direction of the police department and Prosecutor's Office by not sharing any information that would impede ongoing investigations or pending criminal charges. The barriers to sharing information are the most difficult for those that are not directly involved with the case and privy to the facts compiled from the investigation. It requires the public to place their faith and trust in others especially when the health and safety of their children is of concern. We truly attempted to be as transparent as possible. However, this does not change the fact we are limited in the types and extent of information that can be shared.

We provide mental health professionals in every building so that students have someone to talk to when they are struggling. The district put these individuals in place so that we could be proactive in our approach in addressing mental health concerns. Additionally, we provide DARE in 5th and 6th grade so students are educated in not only drugs and alcohol, but also in making good choices. We offer many programs focused on not being a bystander, being kind to others, and making positive choices. Each of these contributes to the efforts of creating a safe and nurturing school environment so that healthy conflicts can be productively and appropriately resolved.

District and building leadership recognize the importance of creating and implementing well-designed safety and security plans. In an effort to create such a plan, we work collaboratively with the Office of Emergency Management, Fire, Police, Prosecutor's Office, and other school districts and safety professionals. We tailor a plan that best meets the needs of each individual building in the district. We continually review and adjust plans so they meet the ever-evolving safety concerns.

We have hired a PRO (Public Relations Officer) for each building. They are responsible for monitoring the entrances to the building and ensures only those authorized to be in the building are permitted to enter. Each of these individuals are trained and experienced law enforcement personnel with the knowledge and skills to identify possible threats. Our buildings have limited their access points during the school day so that unauthorized individuals do not gain access. We have security monitors positioned in our buildings and have provided each PRO with a device so they can monitor cameras from anywhere in the building.

We have emergency plans in place that are practiced by students and staff. We use these drills to continually reassess existing practices and make improvements when identified as necessary. Somerville Police routinely walk the hallways of our buildings getting to know the students, familiarize themselves with the buildings, and assess the security in place.

Our district has led the county in the implementation of the Standard Response Protocol, a countywide school safety plan that promotes common language to assist law enforcement.

We seek input from students, parents, staff, community members, and professionals on ways we can improve what already is visible to public in regards to safety and security. Although this is an extensive list, it is not a complete one. We do not divulge details of the plan because it would be counterproductive in ensuring the safety of all within the school district. We remain open to suggestions for improvement and will continue to monitor existing measures in place to ensure the safety of all.

Finally, we want to close by reassuring you that all the cases are over, at no time were your children in danger, and we will continue to keep them safe and supported.

Sincerely,

Dr. Timothy M. Teehan
Superintendent