

March 2018

Dear Students, Families, Staff, and Community of the Horseheads Central School District:

Recent tragic events have once again reminded us of the importance of continuously observing and practicing safety procedures in our schools, as well as monitoring and protecting the well-being of our students. Our duty is to educate our children in an environment for learning that is free from distractions and as safe as possible – both physically and emotionally.

We also understand that recent events have caused students and adults to want to do something. Please know that we appreciate this, and we ask that you understand that our primary responsibility is to educate our children in a safe, cohesive learning environment, and as such we cannot legally condone activities that disrupt our responsibility to educate. The national conversation on school safety has afforded all of us the opportunity to discuss civics education with our students, allowing those who want to add to the public conversation to do so respectfully and responsibly.

We can and we are using this opportunity to work with our students, to engage them in civics, and to let their voices be heard. Our students have worked with our administration and staff to prepare an educational opportunity in our secondary schools to remember the victims at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida. They are also discussing ways that they can have their voices heard outside of school so that the conversation continues for the betterment of all students and schools across our nation. Collaborative planning and communication help to provide platforms for all to join in on an issue that is important to all of us. Our hope is that we can focus on the educational mission of our schools while still allowing our students to engage in respectful activities rather than calls for civil disobedience in which schools cannot legally participate. Please understand that the district has a legal responsibility to make sure our students are in school and safe while being educated.

What do we do in regard to safety and security? Each of our schools has an active safety team monitoring both the school's security procedures and the current climate, recommendations, and best practices regarding safety. The district also has a district-wide safety committee to guide the schools' efforts and to discuss safety recommendations on a wider scale, reflecting on the many safety drills that we hold annually.

The state requires twelve drills annually: eight fire drills and four lockdown drills. We also practice emergency evacuation procedures. In addition, our district has provided opportunities for staff to explore student mental health issues. At our October 2017 conference day, our teachers heard from local mental health experts and were empowered to consider the actions we can take in our classrooms to promote positive learning environments. To further our knowledge and practices, the district team coordinated an emergency response drill with local law enforcement in October of 2016. Our capital projects also make security a priority.

Beyond the training and learning, our High School and Middle/Intermediate complex have school resource officers onsite each day. These officers also respond to emergencies and safety concerns at our elementary schools. Not only do these officers work with students and staff on security issues, but they also build relationships with our students to support a positive image of law enforcement.

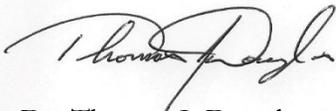
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We are currently assessing and analyzing our buildings and practices with local law enforcement to determine what if any improvements can be made. **We strongly encourage everyone in our community – students, parents, residents – to speak up when they see or hear anything that causes a concern for the safety and wellbeing of our students and staff.** Tell me, a principal, teacher, social worker, bus driver, secretary, cleaner, and/or anyone in our schools.

If you're not comfortable speaking with someone directly, the district has a 24-hour confidential Safe Schools Line for students, parents, and the community to use to report concerns, rumors, and other safety issues. The numbers for our Safe Schools Line are **(607) 795-2044 or 1-800-305-4984**. Know that we are here to listen to your concerns, and we ask that you use this line or talk to someone if you hear a rumor rather than sharing it on social media.

Thank you for caring about our children, our schools, and our community. We must work together to create a safe environment for all.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Thomas J. Douglas". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "T" and "D".

Dr. Thomas J. Douglas
Superintendent of Schools