

Elmira City School District



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Dear Parents:

As the nation reflects on the tragic events in Parkland, Florida, our school community has a responsibility to look within ourselves for possible solutions and answers to the questions that this tragedy has generated. We are committed to providing your children with the best education possible in a safe and nurturing environment. We have worked extremely hard over the past several years to advance our building infrastructure, systems and protocols to keep up with the ever-changing landscape of school safety.

Layered Plans, Resources and Proactive Upgrades to Ensure School Safety

The District partners with representatives from the Elmira Police Department, The Chemung County Sheriff's department, The New York State Police and its Counter Terrorism Division to collaboratively develop plans and procedures for emergency situations that may arise. This joint task-force has allowed us to utilize their expertise and strengthen our Emergency Response Plans. Most importantly, having these groups around the same table regularly has allowed us to train and drill on potential real-life emergencies like active-shooters, bomb threats, fire evacuations, bus safety and other scenarios. Things like upgraded camera systems, a partnership with Armor One (consultants in the field of school safety preparedness), and de-escalation trainings have allowed us to proactively prepare for an emergency.

Additionally and possibly most impactful, all buildings are required to conduct 12 emergency drills throughout the year and 4 of those drills must be lockdowns. Buildings are also required to train on the procedures necessary to react in five key "areas of response" to emergency situations. All 11 buildings in the District have plans that are in place and designed in accordance with The New York State Police Emergency Response Planning Guide. These plans are filed and reviewed annually at the state level and all local law enforcement agencies keep copies of every plan in an easily accessible way.

Addressing the Core and Building a Strong, Healthy Student and Staff Community

We believe that addressing social and emotional health of our educational community is key. The need for this level of service has been on the steady increase over the past few years. In addition to our 15 certified school counselors, we have added social workers at each of our Pre-K -2 buildings and one at Elmira High School specifically to serve students in crisis. We also have licensed mental health counselors' available at all 11 buildings for regular prescriptive mental health counseling for students. We have added several components to our health curriculum to address various mental health conditions and more importantly what to do for students that are showing signs of needing support. Our staff receives training from local experts in the field to better equip and prepare them to address these situations.

The Roles and Responsibilities of School Resource Officers

We currently have three School Resource Officers (SRO) working full time in the District, one at each of our secondary buildings. These SRO's are members of The Chemung County Sheriff's department and each of them have unique and specific training to handle emergency situations in a school setting. Although the use of SRO's in the District is not new, we continually find innovative and proactive ways to utilize this resource within the school community in order to ensure student and staff safety. Our communication, collaboration and cooperation with local law enforcement has never been stronger. I cannot stress enough how valuable these relationships are and how they have impacted our ability to communicate and respond as situations arise.

How Can You Help?

Lastly, we are looking at ways to increase our communication avenues with you. You are the experts when it comes to your children. We want to encourage you to notify us immediately if you hear or see something that you feel is dangerous, out of the ordinary or suspicious. Often times you have access to communication on social media, posts, email, texts or other messaging that we do not have. Any helpful information you can provide to us is appreciated and will remain confidential. The key is that if you know something please let us know about it. We can only effectively address the situations we are aware of and your communication will help us support more students and enhance our community's safety.

As I stated earlier, we are committed to providing your children with a safe and nurturing school environment. We will continue to work on our response plans and continue to work collaboratively with local law enforcement to enhance our practices and procedures. This work is never done and we can never rest on our current level of preparedness. We will always look for ways to better safeguard this community's greatest resource, your children.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact your students' classroom teacher, building principal or the Office of the Superintendent. Safety is our highest priority and a regular topic of our daily dialogue.

Sincerely,

Hillary J. Austin
Superintendent of Schools
Elmira City School District

Sara Lattin
President, Board of Education
Elmira City School District