



West Islip Public Schools

The Michael and Christine Freyer Administration Building

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BERNADETTE M. BURNS
Superintendent of Schools

March 9, 2018

Dear Parents:

Recent events have caused concern and much discussion among members of our community about the safety of our students and staff, and the security of our buildings and grounds. Since the horrific tragedy in Parkland, Florida nearly four weeks ago, there has been increased attention on school safety.

Generally speaking, all schools work to prevent school violence, and schools are safe places. As do all districts in New York State, the West Islip School District has a District Emergency Response Plan that provides an overview of the actions that would be initiated in the event of an emergency. This plan is posted on the district website. Each building also has its own Emergency Response Plan, which is specific and comprehensive in nature - and confidential. School employees are not at liberty to discuss the information in school plans.

The safety of our students and staff and security of our facilities have been, and always will be our number one priority. The West Islip School District has increased its security measures over the last few years, and through the current bond and budget we continue to work to equip our school facilities with updated structural and technological support. Within the next two years, all buildings will have security vestibules and sophisticated visitor management systems. Unfortunately, districts are beholden to the state approval process for architectural and engineering changes, so this process is taking longer than we would like, but it is the district's intent to install the vestibules as soon as possible. Additionally, security guards are assigned during school hours to every building in the district. The district has added an extensive districtwide camera surveillance system, and earlier this year completed the construction of a security surveillance office.

Staff has been reminded of the critical role they play in keeping our schools safe. Students are actively supervised in classrooms, hallways and on playgrounds at all times. Exterior doors remain closed and locked during school hours. Emergency drills are practiced a minimum of 12 times a year to ensure that we are prepared to respond in the event something happens. Visitors are expected to sign in at reception, present identification if not recognized, and wear a visitor's pass at all times when in a building.

Students and parents also have an important role in protecting the school environment by following procedures and reporting concerns. Recently, individuals across our nation have joined together to organize a series of student-led walkouts and demonstrations in an effort to raise awareness of gun violence and the importance of school security. Two of these demonstrations are scheduled for days when school is in session – March 14 and April 20. Our administration and leadership team have met

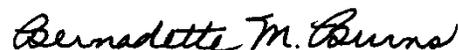
with students and staff to discuss ways in which they can productively participate in this movement. We respect and support the right of our students to advocate for causes that are important to them and welcome the opportunity to work with any student or student group to discuss appropriate and creative ways to do so while at school. However, school districts have no express authority to engage in political activities.

Our district will not encourage nor permit a walkout whereby students exit the building or leave campus, as this would compromise our mission to ensure student safety and building security. Students that attempt to leave the building without authorization will be guided to return. If a student disregards this direction, his/her parents will be contacted. The district's priority is to ensure a safe and secure learning environment for our student body, and actions that distract from this objective or disrupt the educational process may be considered a violation of the District Code of Conduct.

Be assured that great importance is placed on the academic and social-emotional needs of our students while maintaining a safe and orderly learning environment for all. I encourage you to talk to your child about how he/she may be feeling about this topic and the importance of expressing themselves in appropriate ways at school. The actions and reactions of adults have a strong impact on children. By working together, we can better prepare our children to face the uncertainties of our world, and deal with the myriad emotions they may be feeling.

Thank you for your continued support, and if you have any concerns, do not hesitate to call my office or email me at WI.OfficeofSuperintendent@wi.k12.ny.us.

Respectfully,



Bernadette M. Burns
Superintendent of Schools