

Peoria Heights Community Unit School District 325

OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

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Dr. Eric M. Heath, Superintendent
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Dear Parents/Guardians,

In light of recent events involving school safety issues in schools across the nation, I wanted to provide you with information on what Peoria Heights CUSD #325 has done over the last several years in this regard. The safety and security of our students is our top priority, and it is something that we monitor and discuss regularly. Please keep in mind, we need to approach safety and security holistically, and not in a compartmentalized manner. Whether it is fire related, weather related, chemical spills, or even an active shooter situation, we need to be prepared. Below is a snapshot of some of the things we have done and continue to do.

Annual safety plan review-- We are required to conduct a review, annually, in conjunction with fire and law enforcement personnel.

Drills-- We are required to conduct three fire drills per year, one of which involves fire official presence. We are also required to conduct severe weather and shelter-in-place drills. We periodically also utilize canines to conduct locker searches. Further, we conduct unannounced lockdown drills in an effort to practice under stressful situations. We also conduct evacuation drills which prepare students and personnel for suspicious items or persons, hazardous materials, and bomb threats. Finally, we conduct bus evacuation drills every year and drivers engage in annual, mandated training.

Cameras --We have security cameras which cover the interior and exterior of both of our schools.

Exterior Lighting --All of our exterior lights (pole lights and wall packs) have been updated in an effort to provide greater visibility at night during events.

Radios-- Radios have been purchased, installed, and are utilized in our schools. Administrators, recess supervisors, PE teachers, and other personnel have portable radios to use for communication purposes.

New Entrances and Buzz in Systems --We now have systems in place in which visitors have to be buzzed in by office personnel. New security entrances were built in both buildings in 2013 requiring visitors to have to go through two set of doors with security measures to enter the school building.

Peoria Heights Police Department -- The Peoria Heights Police Department and the Village of Peoria Heights has graciously provided a police officer to be present at Peoria Heights Schools on an everyday basis. This resource officer has assisted the school district with developing procedures, facilitating trainings, and providing security to the students and staff of Peoria Heights Schools.

Law enforcement walk-throughs- -We are fortunate to have Officer Vaughn in our district with the children in our schools. He frequently and consistently visits and interacts with students, faculty, and staff.

Ancillary Curricular initiatives --Students in the elementary learn about the keys of character with our “Character Counts” program. Students in the high school are part of the MOJO Leadership program.

Trauma informed practices --Our staff has received training on social and emotional issues surrounding trauma. It is in response to the impact of trauma, emphasizing physical, psychological, and emotional safety and creates opportunities for survivors to rebuild a sense of control and empowerment.

Mandated trainings-- There are 19 trainings that our teachers are required to complete each year or every two years. These include such things as anaphylactic reactions and management, asthma management, blood-borne pathogens, bullying prevention, child abuse and neglect, diabetes awareness, domestic and sexual violence, educator ethics, mental illness and suicidal behavior, peer counseling and anti-violence training, sexual abuse and assault awareness training, and teen dating violence.

Administrative professional development-- The administrative team has received training on Trauma Informed practices as well as having attended numerous school safety workshops, annually.

Employee and Visitor Identification Badges --Employees and visitors wear IDs to easily identify them in a quick manner.

Controlled Access- -Key FOBs provide the district with an electronic record of exterior door entry.

Social/emotional counseling --The district has two full-time counselors in both schools and full time social worker to work with students who may need additional counseling and care.

Proper challenge procedures- -Adults and anyone else on campus without proper credentials or passes are confronted and escorted to main offices.

Automated External Defibrillators --Each building has a device, and there is a portable defibrillator available. Certified staff are being trained in CPR currently.

Numbering of exterior doors --Exterior doors are numbered for use by first responders.

Communication-- We utilize School Messenger for mass communication. We also have the website, social media, and our student information system (SDS).

There are other initiatives that the school district has already started and should be fully implemented by the start of the 2018-2019 School year

Behavior Threat Assessment- -Many of our school personnel have already attended trainings involving this topic, with educators and law enforcement officials from around the region. As a result, the school district is in the process of establishing our own team that is used to evaluate the risk posed by a student or another person, typically as a response to an actual or perceived threat or concerning behavior.

New emergency notification system --The school district is in the process of purchasing and installing a new emergency notification system to be done in the summer of 2018. This new system will work in conjunction with our fire alarm system and our bell system. This emergency notification system will provide the ability for auditory announcements across both schools to give better visual and auditory signals, and easier identification of troubled areas.

Off-Site Evacuation Drills -- In the coming weeks, we conduct off-site evacuation drills in which our entire student body goes to established, off-site locations, in the event of an emergency.

Discussions regarding safety and security are ongoing. Additional security measures will be undertaken as part of our comprehensive effort to improve what we do. There is no one solution to this issue. We need to continue to be vigilant, build relationships, enlist the assistance of local, regional, and state agencies, and continue to communicate in effective ways.

Sincerely,

Dr. Eric Heath
Superintendent