

January 10, 2013

Dear Parents/Guardians:

The safety and welfare of our students and staff will always be our highest priority. To be certain, we were troubled by the recent tragedy in Connecticut. There is nothing more heart breaking than the deaths of innocent children in such a senseless act of violence. As a parent of school-aged children and as school superintendent, I feel a tremendous sense of responsibility to ensure that we provide the safest environment possible for all of our children.

Overall, schools are safe places for children and staff, but recent events have certainly caused every school system to more closely review all facets of school security. We have taken the approach that we want to respond appropriately in a proactive manner rather than react emotionally without a solid plan of action. A review of our crisis plan was completed before the start of the current school year and we continue to evaluate these procedures.

Cabot Schools maintains a solid, cooperative partnership with local police and fire departments. District and local emergency responders will be conducting supervised lock down drills at various locations in the school system this month. All district administrators will be in attendance to observe and be involved in debriefing sessions led by law enforcement. Subsequently, each school will be expected to implement and document lock down drills periodically throughout the year just as we perform fire and tornado drills.

The district works in partnership with the Cabot Police Department and currently employs three full-time police officers. The officers are based at the high school and two junior high schools, but respond to calls for assistance at every school in the district. In addition, we have a great partnership with the Ward Police Department and they provide extra patrols for Ward Central Elementary on a daily basis. The Lonoke County Sheriff's Office and Austin Police Department are always willing to assist when requested as well. Local emergency responders have access to every school and classroom in the district without the need for district or school staff to provide entry.

Security cameras are placed in key positions throughout the Cabot School District. These cameras display and record real time video that can be viewed online by district administrators and emergency responders utilizing our remote video feed. School officials and local police often use videos when investigating incidents. Intercom systems are installed in every classroom allowing staff to communicate directly with the school office. The district has a dedicated phone line based at the district office that allows immediate and uninterrupted priority communication to every school and department in the district.

We have schools that were built in a time when architects and school officials did not need to think about the kinds of safety and security issues we face in 2013. We are considering facility modifications across the district that may be considered not as 'welcoming' as currently found, but will allow for a safer and more secure environment. It is imperative, regardless of how often you visit our schools, that you always sign-in as a visitor and be prepared with identification each time you plan to check out a student from school.

Reinforce with your child that it is important for them to always listen closely and take emergency drills seriously. Fire code does not allow doors to be locked in such a way that prohibits an individual from exiting the building in the event of an emergency. Explain to your child that it is never acceptable to use the push bar to open a door for someone at school. Staff members that are authorized to use these doors will have a key and everyone else should use the main entrance to the building.

Your patience through this process that may require changes and new procedures is greatly appreciated. Working together will ensure that all of our schools continue to be safe places for staff and our children.

Sincerely,



Dr. Tony Thurman
Superintendent