

ANNOUNCEMENT

September 24, 2018

SAFETY & SECURITY

Understandably, the events last week were difficult for our community to process. I know there has been significant concern on social media, leading to some misinformation and rumors, which add to anxiety levels.

Additionally, I acknowledge that communication surrounding this incident was insufficient for many parents. As is our practice, we will review, reflect, and identify where we can grow. We appreciate the feedback we received and will use those suggestions as we plan improvements.

I want everyone to know that D39 and the Wilmette Police Department (PD) have a strong history of collaboration. It is important to understand that, with the Wilmette PD, we take many proactive actions to ensure the safety of our students. However, we cannot always talk about these proactive steps, as they are confidential.

The Wilmette PD has an ongoing investigation regarding this incident, and D39 shares every student, staff, or parent report. I have been told there will likely be another follow-up police report this week

Next, I would like to review the timeline of what has happened since last Sunday. I hope this helps everyone better understand the chain of events.

On Sunday, September 16th, at about 11:00 am, I was notified by our Chief that police responded to a WJHS parent who found weapons in their child's bedroom. Through the home investigation, police did not find any threat to a D39 school, student, or staff member.

The weapons were secured, but later the police learned the child had experimented with possible explosive devices. Since this child was a WJHS student, the police chief felt a complete search of the school was prudent, and I agreed. The Cook County Bomb Squad was called, and a search of WJHS was conducted. Thankfully, nothing was found. In this matter, we continue to be assured that our schools, students, and staff are safe.

With no direct threat, and nothing found at WJHS, the ongoing investigation became primarily a police matter. However, I knew this would impact the D39 community. As a result, with the Wilmette PD, we created a joint statement for our families. As the investigation had only just begun, we agreed that our joint statement would provide limited information. At about 5:00 pm on September 16th, just after the school search concluded, the joint statement was emailed to D39 families and staff.

The Wilmette PD issued their own press release at 8:00 PM on September 16th, and it contained details not included in our joint statement. I learned of the press release on Monday morning, September 17th. Right away, we knew that families and staff needed additional communication from D39.

Our follow up email was sent at 8:40 am on Monday, with the primary purpose of giving everyone a link to the Wilmette PD press release. It also let parents know we were working with teachers to help them address student concerns, and that we would have further updates.

Later that same day, before school was out, we sent a more comprehensive communication, giving families information on school safety and our anonymous student reporting system, as well as talking points for parents to use with their children. Staff members received this same information.

On Monday, individual staff were supported as needed, culminating in an after school meeting where we provided staff guidance to help students. All WJHS teachers were provided a statement to share with students during homeroom Tuesday morning. This included reinforcing ways in which students can/should report concerns.

I heard from many parents throughout last week. I sent a follow-up email Friday afternoon that included a status update on the police investigation from the Village of Wilmette. Given our collective concern about safety, I also included a link to a Board report on school security presented in August.

But security doesn't end with that Board report. We have engaged security consultants and law enforcement officials to guide our next steps. We have embedded school security into our strategic plan, and we will make more improvements.

Additionally, we review every single recommendation made by students, parents, and staff. Recent requests have suggested additional security cameras, increased social media monitoring, student empowerment supporting "If you see it, say it," and even a request to consider metal detectors, just to name a few. We will follow up and communicate more school security updates this year.

I want to close by sharing that student and family privacy is another priority. Any time a student is involved, D39 has a legal duty to protect privacy. However, when we withhold information to protect a child's privacy, we realize it can create an information void and cause frustration and anxiety in the community.

I encourage the D39 community to understand the need to support one another. This way, collectively, we will work to balance the needs of everyone. Together our goal is to safeguard our community, while safeguarding each child.