



Emergency Procedures and Protocol Keeping our Students and Staff Safe

We take seriously the safety of students and staff. Our principals and central office administrators have been collectively overseeing schools and students for more than 125 years, which allows us to rely on a valuable set of experiences when safety is concerned.

Every quarter the district's safety team meets to review safety procedures, protocols, and results from drills designed to help students and staff respond in the case of an emergency. Once a year this meeting also includes local law enforcement and responder agencies, as well as community partner agencies, to discuss and improve on our approaches and practices.

Each of our schools participates annually in 3 fire drills, 1 lockdown drill, and 1 severe weather drill. We have also, over the past years, incorporated double door entry systems, increased security camera coverage, and check-in procedures for schools. Each school has an approved safety plan that includes procedures for active shooter scenarios, tornadoes, bomb threats, and other possible emergency situations.

The district contracts with the City and the County for School Resource Officers (SRO's) who are on-site daily at Belvidere and Belvidere North High Schools and respond to needs at corresponding elementary and middle schools. SRO's are trained and certified under the National Association of School Resource Officers, which is a 40-hour training course. They also participate in continued education trainings each summer at state and national conventions.

As soon as school officials were made aware of a possible safety rumor at Belvidere North they responded quickly and immediately involved local law enforcement officials to conduct an internal investigation. At no time were students thought to be at risk by our staff or by local law enforcement. We know some will disagree with the decisions and timing regarding notifications; we appreciate any acknowledgment that these are always more complex decisions than an outsider may be able to see.

Unless there is a credible risk to student safety, we will traditionally not notify parents of an internal investigation. Notifications will reach parents when we are confident that such a notification will add more value than new fear to the situation. In the case of Belvidere North last week, after taking hourly reports from staff members on the number of students expressing concern and the number of phone calls coming into the school, we decided that enough parents had heard different versions of rumors that there was significant value in sending out a phone and email notification to all parents at the school.



Every principal in the district, their school administration team, and the district office take all safety incidents and possibilities seriously. We address each one individually, and try to make the best decision for all of our students and their families, weighing the benefits of notifications regarding an internal investigation and the possible disruption such a notification causes.

Last week's circumstance ended without incident, other than approximately half of the students at Belvidere North did not attend school on Friday. Knowing the good work that our school teams conduct regularly, I believe much of the non-attendance was due to heightened fear created on social media by students and parents. A small number of individuals, hiding behind a curtain of anonymity, created false social media accounts designed specifically to feed the fear. A few individuals also actively, and with seeming ill-intent, campaigned in and out of the school to keep the rumors alive over the course of many days.

While I am disappointed in the actions of a few individuals from this past week, I am sorry for any concern the incidents have caused to families. After seeing our school teams in action, I am more confident than ever that we have a great staff who are doing everything they can to keep your students safe in our great schools.

Sincerely,

Dr. Daniel Woestman, Superintendent