



THE OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

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Dr. Joris M. Ray
Superintendent

SCS Parents,

I am sounding the alarm.

Our hometown is known for its pride and soul, but I'm grieved that Memphis has also become synonymous with disturbing acts of crime and violence.

The proverbial 99 percent of Memphis-Shelby County Schools students are getting it right. Our teachers are teaching amid a health crisis. Students are masked up, in class, and on task. Learning is happening, and our District is on a path to reimagine education in the 901.

Still, social media timelines and media reports tell a grim story of the 1 percent. While we cannot deny that there has been an uptick of violence in our community, schools continue to be a safe haven. Our schools must be a place to run to and not run from. We have comprehensive supports to keep reaching the challenged 1 percent, but we cannot do it alone.

I am sounding the alarm.

Before children can learn, they must first feel SAFE. Since returning to in-person learning following the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a NATIONWIDE increase in school violence. More fights. More bullying. More threats. More guns. Tensions are high, and consequences are an afterthought.

I am sounding the alarm.

We are ramping up our resources to keep our schools safe and are offering more mental health services. Yet, violence continues to spill into our schools. It's hurting our neighborhoods, our families, and our children.

Since becoming superintendent in 2019, together with our School Board, we have invested nearly \$100 million dollars in social-emotional learning and conflict-resolution curriculum. With these investments we've also:

- Increased the number of social workers and behavioral specialists.
- Expanded the number of ReSET Rooms in schools and hired more ReSET Room assistants.
- Implemented tele-therapy and a social-emotional hotline for students and families
- Enlisted more truancy staff and family engagement specialists.
- Developed a plan to establish three new evening mental health centers.

I am sounding the alarm.

We have clearly defined rules and codes of conduct to ensure the safety of students and staff. We understand that students come from all walks of life and that a one-size-fits-all approach to discipline is not the answer. That is why we are focused on progressive discipline and restorative practices that give students opportunities to reset their behavior before matters escalate. We are here to EDUCATE and support our

students. But let me be clear, **I have no tolerance for weapons in schools, and we will take appropriate action for disruptive behavior.**

I am sounding the alarm.

Mothers, fathers, aunts, uncles, grandmothers, grandfathers, cousins and neighbors, this work has begun in earnest, and we need you to be vigilant.

Children today are growing up fast and taking on more roles and responsibilities. However, neurologically their brains are not ready to make wise choices. Parents, here are a few suggestions to guide your child(ren):

- Do daily check-ins and have conversations with them.
- Ask them about their day and their interests—even if you get an eye roll or shrug in response.
- Ask if anything is bothering them.
- If you have guns in your home, keep them safe and secure.
- Check their backpacks before and after school.
- Monitor their social media.
- Let them know they don't have to be self-reliant. You've got their back.
- Keep your children busy and involved in activities that they enjoy.

If you are looking for an opportunity to make a difference in a child's life, I'm calling ALL males across the District and in our community to join our Band of Brothers Mentorship Program. Visit: www.scsk12.org/ourboys.

Our before, during, and after school tutoring programs are happening now for students in K-12. We'll also be relaunching our internships and externships with community partners this spring. These are just a few ways to keep our students engaged.

I am sounding the alarm.

This work is personal to me, and I wholeheartedly believe in our educators and children. We all love and want what is best for the children of Memphis-Shelby County Schools. Support is always available.

At the beginning of the school year, you should have received information about school-based supports for your child(ren) including contacts for school counselors, behavioral specialists, and social workers. If you have questions, please reach out to your school and visit scsk12.org/instructionalresources/sel to access social-emotional resources for families or call the SCS Social Emotional Support Line at 901-416-8484.

I appreciate you and thank you for your steadfast support.

Together, we must BELIEVE.

Together, we will ACHIEVE.

Together, we are REIMAGINING 901.

I am sounding the alarm.

Sincerely,



Dr. Joris M. Ray
Shelby County Schools
Superintendent