



Southwest Licking Local Schools

Robert T. Jennell, Superintendent

The past days have given us a sober reminder of our sacred duty to ensure the safety of our students. Our thoughts are with those families affected by the recent events in Florida and in Westerville.

At Southwest Licking Local Schools, we attempt to stay at the forefront of this issue. Roughly five years ago, our entire district went through ALICE (Alert, Lockdown, Inform, Counter, Evade) training in cooperation with our local law enforcement. A few parents saw the need for teachers to barricade themselves in a classroom in the event of an emergency and privately raised the funds to purchase barricade devices and lobbied our state government for permission to use them. Since that time, we use one day prior to the start of the school year for the purpose of training our staff on safety techniques. We have taken a holistic approach to safety by including such topics as emergency medicine, mental health, and signs of drug use. We have partnered with the Licking County Sheriff's Office, Pataskala Police, West Licking Fire Department, Licking County EMS, Ohio State University, Licking County Drug Task Force, and Tyler's Light, to name just a few.

We also have a way for students and community members to report potential problems to the school. Each of our buildings has a report form on the website where individuals can report problems. These forms are anonymous, and allow students and parents to "see something, say something". The district has also invested in security cameras for most of the common areas of schools in order to help keep our schools safe.

Finally, the SWL Board of Education has recently approved the cost to have a School Resource Officer (SRO) placed in our district each day. This individual will be a deputy from the Licking County Sheriff's Office who will be tasked with first and foremost developing a positive connection with students to hopefully prevent issues. However, in the event of an emergency, we will have immediate access to law enforcement. The deputy will be armed with their standard equipment.

It is natural in today's day and age to see events and wonder what our school is doing. Please be assured that we take all threats seriously and that we work very closely with our first responders. We continually examine our practices to see what we can do better.

In the meantime, there are a few items you can do to help us:

- Talk with your student about what is going on around them. Whether you realize it or not, students are more aware of what is going on in the world than what you might think. Make sure you have time to talk to your kids about what is going on.
- If you get a bad feeling about something that just makes you think something is wrong, say something. Contact the school or law enforcement. Remember, it is better to be safe than sorry. As a reminder you can always fill out one of the report forms online. Those forms go directly to the building principal.
- Check your student's social media accounts and online interactions. It is truly a different world. Bullying and harassment rarely imitate the "give me your lunch money". Stay involved.

Just remember that we are all working together for a common objective of keeping our children safe. We will stay vigilant, and we will continue to work with local experts to ensure every student can come to a safe school in order to maximize their individual learning.

Sincerely,

Robert T. Jennell, Superintendent