



## Pearl River School District

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**Marco F. Pochintesta**  
Superintendent of Schools

February 13, 2018

Dear Parents,

The focus of my letter this month is safety. The physical and emotional well-being of our students is always our top priority, but what does that work look like? In terms of physical safety, all of our schools and the district are required to maintain up-to-date safety plans. Confidential school plans are submitted to the NYS Education Department and shared with local law enforcement. The district-wide safety plan is regularly reviewed and is posted on our website. Our schools perform numerous drills throughout the year to practice different emergency scenarios. In an effort to provide common language and an understanding of various protective actions that our schools take, we have created a new chart for parents that explains the different actions, why we might use them, and recommended parental responses. Since every emergency is situation specific, these actions serve as guidelines. The chart can be found on our district webpage under [For Parents>Emergency Response Procedures](#).

Another aspect of our work on physical safety is addressing the risk-taking behavior that children may engage in as they enter adolescence. Early this year, I wrote to parents regarding the dangers surrounding a new trend, vaping. In addition to providing trainings for our staff and a Parent University on the topic, all students in grades 8-12 received information regarding the dangers of vaping through their physical education classes from the Rockland Council on Alcoholism & Other Drug Dependence (RCADD). At the Middle School, Principal, Ms. Paese, and Orangetown Police Department's School Resource Officer, Detective Meyers, held special assemblies with all three grades to explain the concerns and dangers of vaping.

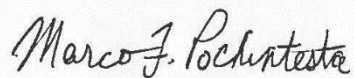
Another critical area is the emotional well-being of our students. We have all read about the tragedies in our county and neighboring counties as a result of teen depression and other mental health issues. Last school year, all of our faculty and administration completed an educational training program on teen suicide prevention sponsored by the Society for the Prevention of Teen Suicide, SPTS University. This year, our school social worker, Norma Canals, participated in a week long workshop to become a Youth Mental Health First Aid trainer. Two weeks ago, our school psychologists, school counselors, HS nurse, health teachers, and several administrators received training in Youth Mental Health First Aid from Ms. Canals. We will continue to develop training plans on this topic for our faculty.

We have posted a new webpage on our high school website called [Keeping Teenagers Safe](#). This page is meant to serve as a parent resource for information regarding topics that affect teens today and can be found under the *For Parents* tab.

The mental health benefits of a good night's sleep were recognized early in our nation's history by Benjamin Franklin in his "early to bed, early to rise" adage. In recent years, the research conducted by the medical community on the connections between sleep and learning have received increased attention and in some districts school schedules are changing to reflect this information. The Pearl River School District administration will conduct a feasibility study to identify all the implications of potential changes to school schedules. Having an understanding of all of the factors at work in any change scenario is an important first step. Understanding the wishes of the community on this subject is also critically important. Our feasibility study will provide us with the information we need to develop a survey and communicate with the community in an informed manner on a potential change.

Knowing that "Every Child Can and Will Learn" happens best in caring and nurturing environments, we are committed to continuous improvement and learning on how to best serve the physical safety and social emotional needs of all our students.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Marco J. Pochintesta". The signature is written in a cursive style and is set against a light gray rectangular background.