

Superintendent's Views – 3/8/18

School Safety is a priority for Plateau Valley School District #50. Last month in Florida was the epitome of the worst fears we all share in public education. The entire Plateau Valley school community have a shared objective and that is keeping our kids safe from harm. Our school district employees had training in the Standard Response Protocol (SRP) in January. SRP was founded by John Michael and Ellen Stoddard-Keyes through the "I Love You Guys" Foundation. I encourage you to do your own research on their website, www.iloveyoguys.org. Their site explains the background for the SRP, as well as posters and other documents for you to look through. When something like Parkland happens, it is natural for parents to have questions about their child's safety. Hopefully, I can answer most of them with this letter.

The SRP has 4 actions:

1. Lockdown – Locks, Lights, Out of Sight.
2. Lockout – Secure the Perimeter.
3. Evacuate – To Announced Location.
4. Shelter – Hazard and Safety Strategy.

These 4 actions are explained in greater detail on this link to the Student/Parent handout, <http://iloveyoguys.org/srp/SRP%20K12%20Student%20Parent%20Handout%20v2.pdf>. We have begun to visit with elementary grades about the 4 actions and practicing in their own classrooms. We will continue to communicate with older students in large groups before we have a "Lockdown Drill."

Plateau Valley SD is also providing a room in the main office that the Collbran Marshal can now work from so he can be on-site more often. Our hope is a joint venture with the Town of Collbran to ensure we have an officer on-site during school hours.

Our school buildings all have a single point of entry which requires a person to ring the bell and be allowed into the building. On the other side of the locked door, our office staff can see who the person is and push a button for them to gain entry. All visitors must check-in at the office and be given a visitor's pass, that is worn throughout their stay at our school. All other exterior doors are locked and kept closed at all times.

We also are continually searching for tools to help guide parents through discussions about school violence, Mental Health America offers the following suggestions:

- **Encourage children to talk about their concerns and to express their feelings.** Some children may be hesitant to initiate such conversation, so you may want to prompt them by asking if they feel safe at school. When talking with younger children remember to talk on their level. For example, they may not understand the term "violence" but can talk to you about being afraid or a classmate who is mean to them.
- **Talk honestly about your own feelings regarding school violence.** It is important for children to recognize they are not dealing with their fears alone.

- **Validate the child's feelings.** Do not minimize a child's concerns. Let him/her know that serious school violence is not common, which is why incidents such as Columbine and Conyers, Georgia, attract so much media attention. Stress that schools are safe places. In fact, recent studies have shown that schools are more secure now than ever before.
- **Empower children to take action regarding school safety.** Encourage them to report specific incidents (such as bullying, threats or talk of suicide) and to develop problem solving and conflict resolution skills. Encourage older children to actively participate in student-run anti-violence programs.
- **Discuss the safety procedures that are in place at your child's school.** Explain why visitors sign in at the principal's office or certain doors remain locked during the school day. Help your child understand that such precautions are in place to ensure his or her safety and stress the importance of adhering to school rules and policies.
- **Create safety plans with your child.** Help identify which adults (a friendly secretary, trusted teacher or approachable administrator) your child can talk to if they feel threatened at school. Also ensure that your child knows how to reach you (or another family member or friend) in case of crisis during the school day. Remind your child that they can talk to you anytime they feel threatened.
- **Recognize behavior that may indicate your child is concerned about returning to school.** Younger children may react to school violence by not wanting to attend school or participate in school-based activities. Teens and adolescents may minimize their concerns outwardly, but may become argumentative, withdrawn, or allow their school performance to decline.
- **Keep the dialogue going** and make school safety a common topic in family discussions rather than just a response to an immediate crisis. Open dialogue will encourage children to share their concerns.
- **Seek help when necessary.** If you are worried about a child's reaction or have ongoing concerns about his/her behavior or emotions, contact a mental health professional at school or at your community mental health center. Your local Mental Health Association or the National Mental Health Association's Information Center can direct you to resources in your community.

As mentioned before, Plateau Valley School District understands the need to keep the most prized possessions of all families of this community safe. We will continue refining our efforts dealing with school safety. We will continue to strive to make our schools a place where your children feel safe. Plateau Valley wants to also make sure you are greeted by friendly staff members that are entrusted with the children of our community, while keeping that balance of school security. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to call or come see us at the school.