



October 20, 2021

Dear students, staff, families and community,

We are all shaken by the recent threats of violence on the secondary campus. The safety and well-being of our school community is our number one priority. In addition to working with the Whatcom County Sheriff's Office on these specific threats, I wanted to share with you some other resources and backgrounds on how we can all work together to keep our community safe.

First, we have ongoing relationships with local law enforcement agencies (Sheriff, Tribal Police, Border Patrol, etc.). Working with these agencies we have developed and practiced comprehensive response plans to a variety of scenarios (natural disaster, violence, etc.). I have been asked about holding active shooter drills on our campus. Not only has the effectiveness of these drills been questioned, our local partners have done specific work on responding to school violence. If you would like to read more about the concerns regarding active shooter drills, you can access an article [here](#).

Second, the secondary campus practices fire drills, earthquake drills and lockdown drills every month. Our staff understand the safety protocols and cover these procedures with students throughout each school year. There will be a planned lockdown drill tomorrow during the school day. It will be made clear to students that it is a drill. Please know that there have been no threats to our elementary schools, but we have safety protocols in place that are practiced on a regular basis for any emergency situation at our elementary schools as well.

Third, a key way to keep our community safe is with family involvement with the school community. 80% of guns used in school violence are taken from the home of the shooter or the homes of relatives or friends. Teens are experiencing unprecedented mental health challenges right now and we encourage you to continue checking in on your student (and their friends!).

Fourth, encourage your students to talk to you or another adult if they know ANYTHING about any threats at school. In 77% of past shootings another person has known the plans of the shooter. All school staff members are ready to listen to any information you or your students have about this (or any) threat on campus.

Finally, here are some tips for talking to your child about these types of threats:

**Take your cues from your child:**

Invite your child to tell you how they feel about going to school. Don't ask leading questions — "Are you worried about going to school?" — but do give them an opportunity to express what's on their mind. Assuming you've discussed the threats, you might ask if they expect to discuss it at school, or whether they expect any school activities relating to it.

**Give them ample opportunity to ask questions:**

It's reassuring to children, and helps diminish frightening fantasies, to express what they're worried about. If your child is thinking that their classroom may no longer be — or feel — safe, it's good to listen to those fears.

**Acknowledge their feelings, but remain calm:**

You can let your child know that you can understand why they might be uneasy. And then you can have a factual conversation about how [rare school shootings are](#). You can also assure them that when they happen, they are investigated carefully, to identify causes and help prevent it from happening again. It's confidence-building for kids to know that we learn from negative experiences.

**Emphasize school safety:**

Remind your child that their school is a very safe place, filled with teachers and other adults who love children and have dedicated their lives to helping them. Remind them of the drills and policies already in place to keep students safe.

**Give extra reassurance:**

Don't be surprised if your child is unusually clingy or needy, and do be prepared to slow your morning routines and be physically affectionate and comforting.

**Listen when they're not talking:**

Be on the lookout for nonverbal cues indicating anxiety. Your student who hasn't asked you about the recent threats made but who has heard about them from their peers and teachers, and whose sleep and eating habits have changed, may need to have a conversation — even if they aren't asking in words.

**Know who else can help:** Teachers and school counselors will be ready to help children with any concerns they might have while they are in school. Encourage your child to talk to them if they are feeling overwhelmed. Let them know that it's fine to bring the subject up again to you or anyone else if they have questions or feelings they want to share later.

You can access more resources regarding talking with children about school violence [here](#).

There have also been questions about mask requirements in music classes. Three-ply masks are recommended when students are singing because singing is considered high risk. Elementary music classes incorporate a variety of musical activities including singing, playing instruments, and movement. Therefore, three-ply masks are not required for every activity. For students not able to wear three-ply masks for singing there have been accommodations made to engage them in the learning using instruments and other strategies to access the learning and music standards.

We are in the midst of administrating state required testing given we were not able to test last year. This will also allow us to assess where students are academically after a long period of remote learning. We will be testing again in the Spring which will allow us to see growth given all of our efforts to address learning loss from the last year and a half of COVID impacted learning.

I appreciate all of the communication from parents and community members this past week. Together we will keep our schools safe and welcoming places for all students. We are Baker Strong!

Sincerely,

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