

MADISON

PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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April 2018 Newsletter

Madison School Community,

It is incredible how much has happened since the February edition of this newsletter! From musicals, to student civic action, to weather-related school closings and make-up days - the month of March passed by in a blink!

Of the issues that we have recently experienced, however, perhaps the most notable has been the impact of the recent tragedy at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida. Over these last weeks, I have had excellent opportunities to discuss matters of school security with fellow superintendents, our school administrators, the Board of Education, the Borough Council, the Madison Police Department and groups of parents that have attended my Superintendent coffees. It is now my pleasure to extend this conversation to the rest of our school community.



In this newsletter, you will find commentary on two key topics related to school security. First, I provide a brief analysis of school shooting statistics as an unbiased clarification of what we can learn from past school shootings. Please note that I do not comment on gun legislation reform as this is a public policy issue. Second, I provide an explanation of the improvement measures that our district is initiating to ensure the optimal security of our schools. Each section includes links to key resources. I hope that this information can reduce uncertainty and provide a productive starting point for future conversations.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information and for your investment in the safety and education of our students.

Sincerely,

Mark Schwarz

Superintendent of Madison Public Schools

What we know about school shootings

While the topic can be stomach turning, school shooting trends analysis can inform our future efforts to prevent potential violence in our schools. As many of you may have conducted your own research on these terrible tragedies, you have likely have found it difficult to make sense of the varying and sometimes conflicting sources. For example, [Education Week](#) has recently created a database on school shootings in an attempt to provide objectivity, but the resource lacks useful analysis. Other sources including [Everytown Research](#) and [Northeastern University](#) have conducted their own studies, but their conclusions appear influenced by political agendas. The most comprehensive and non-partisan study of past school shootings can be found in a [2002 Study by the U.S. Education Department and U.S. Secret Service](#), but the study has not been updated to include more recent events. Despite the limitations of each source, however, a careful review of what is available has left me with the following key learnings about past school shooters:

- Most school shootings were conducted by students or former students of the attacked school. Some shootings were conducted by individuals that were not students. These non-students were usually adults.
- School shooters do not fit a common profile. Most were male. Some could be characterized as “loners,” but others appeared to be “good students” who appeared to be well-adjusted.

What we know about school shootings...continued

- School shooters usually provided warning signs. Most of these individuals shared vague indications of their intentions or engaged in suspicious behavior that was evident to others.
- Prior to attacking, school shooters typically experienced loss and/or persecution by others.

Lastly, it is important to note that school shootings are rare, but real. Considering that only 193 of the 130,000 public and private K-12 schools in the U.S. were subject to shootings since 1999, it might appear unlikely that a school shooting would occur in Madison. Rather than becoming complacent over the infrequency of these events, however, our efforts should be directed at further reducing the likelihood of tragedy by steadily improving our security and wellness measures. Additionally, these key learnings appear to support our belief that suspicious activity reporting, inclusive practices and mental health supports are paramount in our effort to prevent school violence.

Security and wellness enhancements through multiple measures

Equipped with these key learnings, we are best prepared to advance our conversation to the improvement of our school security. As I have stated in a recent memo to the community, we should begin with the knowledge that our schools are currently safe places. That said, there is much that we can do to improve.

After consulting with the Madison Police Department, reviewing historic school shooting analyses, and reviewing sources on school shooting prevention, including [The Youth Violence Project](#), the [Philadelphia Children's Hospital](#), and the [NJ School Security Task Force Report](#), I am pleased to share that we have identified the following immediate and future measures:

Immediate Measures

The following measures are currently being employed or are in development for the 2017-18 school year:

Making our schools explicitly positive places – Madison has a tradition of celebrating education and we must continue to ensure that our programs nurture, inspire and enlighten young people in accordance with our mission statement; Our schools are safest when all students are “inspired to contribute positively to the world.”

Suspicious activity reporting (SAR) – All staff, students and community members are being continually instructed that, “If you see something, do something.” If you observe behavior that could result in harm, contact your school’s office or dial 911. We would rather respond to a false alarm than miss a warning sign.

GoGuardian web-browsing alerts - Our content filter has an intelligent feature that flags and reports student website browsing related to inappropriate content, violence or self-harm. These reports are reviewed regularly and have already resulted in several successful interventions on behalf of students who have needed support. These reports are reviewed by administrators, who contact parents (and police, when necessary) if a student safety issue or policy violation is identified (see Board Policy 2361).

Increased door security and screening measures – We are currently developing new protocols to reduce access to our buildings and ensure that visitors are who they say they are. In the near future, individuals will not be permitted to enter the school without an appointment or verifiable reason.

NJ Department of Education School Security Specialist training – Two of our district administrators are scheduled for training to become licensed School Security Specialists. This is a new license from the NJDOE which certifies these individuals as security resources for schools. These individuals will not be armed.

Measures to be Implemented for 2018-2019

We are currently budgeting and planning for the following additional security improvements to take effect in September of 2018:

Increased security camera coverage with remote access for local law enforcement – Installation of additional cameras is being scheduled as soon as possible. In the event of an emergency, the Madison Police will be able to access a live feed from the cameras from anywhere.

Additional School Resource Officer at MJS – This officer will be armed and supervised by the Madison Police Department. Both this officer and Madison School Resource Officer, Vincent Galgano, will be available for support to the elementary schools as well.

ALICE Training for Staff and Students – The ALICE protocol is a flexible response system that enables staff and students with options for finding safety in a critical situation. This ongoing training will be customized for age appropriateness and the unique qualities of each building.

HIBster anti-bullying software – This software will enable anonymous bullying reporting for students and parents in order to facilitate and accelerate the school's ability to receive information and intervene on behalf of our students.

Additional Social Worker - This additional district employee will be available for mental health services and will also serve as a case manager for the school child study teams.

Madison Multi-Tiered System of Supports – This system will be a district-wide wellness, inclusion and intervention program that will support:

- The behavioral, academic and emotional needs of all students
- Academic and emotional interventions to close our achievement gap
- The development of positive school climate
- Outreach initiatives for struggling and/or disaffected students
- Training for staff in identifying and supporting struggling and/or disaffected students

New Standards for Student Workloads – By establishing district standards for student workloads regarding homework, projects and assessments, we hope to reduce stress and increase meaningful student engagement.

Further Measures to be Explored

While we may not have these measures in place for 2018-19, plans for these measures are currently underway:

Increased intercom functionality – We are exploring options for enhancing our intercom systems to enable lockdown alerts to be called from anywhere in the schools. Additionally, this will enable schools to set up “command centers” in the event of an emergency so that real time instructions can be provided to staff and students.

Additional Elementary School Guidance Counselor – In order to provide support services to our elementary students, we hope to be able to hire an additional elementary guidance counselor so that each elementary school can have a dedicated counselor.

Gun-shot detectors and panic buttons – Both systems would have functionality to simultaneously invoke a lockdown exercise while alerting the local authorities.

Security Vestibules – Requiring varying degrees of construction, vestibules are also referred to as “man traps” for their ability to create secure locations for visitors to enter the building with restricted access.

Door Alarms – By alarming doors that are not authorized to be opened, we can ensure that exterior doors are closed and locked - and stay that way. This will prevent doors from being propped open and will alert staff if a student leaves the building improperly.

While experts agree that there is no way to completely avoid school violence, these measures will certainly reduce our staff and students' exposure to risk. Each effort will make a contribution, but all require planning, training and monitoring.

I will greatly appreciate your support as we coordinate with law enforcement officials to allocate our attention and resources to these priorities. In the meantime, please continue to provide feedback regarding any suggestions you have to keep our students safe and thriving in Madison Public Schools.

Help Name This Newsletter Contest!

Thank you to everyone that submitted name suggestions for this newsletter! Thank you to everyone who made a creative contribution. The finalists are as follows:

The Dodger-in-Chief
The Scoop from the Supe
MadisOnward
Madison Edvancement
The Rose Delivery
The Madison Monthly
Madison Matters
The Dodger Digest
The Woodland Road Report
The Jolly Dodger

Voting will take place via a survey which will be emailed to all staff, students, and guardians.
Be sure to cast your vote!

About Your Superintendent

Mark Schwarz began his service to Madison Public Schools on August 14, 2017. Prior, Mr. Schwarz served Rockaway Borough Schools in the roles of Vice Principal, Principal and Superintendent. He began his career as a high school social studies teacher, volleyball coach and curriculum supervisor in the Jefferson Township School District.

He holds his MA in Educational Leadership from Seton Hall University and is currently studying as a Doctoral student in SHU's K-12 School Administration program. The proud father of two boys and husband to fellow teacher, Sharon, he resides with his family in the Lake Mohawk community of Sparta, New Jersey.