



Ms. Eileen F. Shafer
State District Superintendent

Dear Parent/Guardian,

Re: Message on School Safety

The safety of our children and staff is our top priority at Paterson Public Schools!

On February 14, we learned of yet another tragic mass shooting – this time at a high school in Parkland, Florida. As we collectively continue to grieve for the 17 young lives lost on that day, it is only natural to question whether we have done enough as a nation to protect our children while at school. We tend to ask whether we are prepared to handle a crisis of this magnitude here in Paterson.

I am truly impressed and inspired by the Parkland High School students and I applaud their civic engagement in an effort to affect positive change. You may have heard that as an outcome of their activism, students across our nation have planned for a collective walkout from their schools on March 14, 2018. The goal is to spend 17 minutes to honor each victim of the Parkland, Florida, tragic mass shooting.

Our district leadership and school administration teams have met to discuss, plan and prepare for this event. While we unequivocally do not advocate for student walkouts, we will support student expression of active civic engagement regarding this matter. It is our position that protesting can take on many forms of action, beyond a walkout. Administrators are having meaningful conversations with student leaders and staff to map out a school plan of solidarity. Additionally, students are welcome to participate in the *National Day of Action Against Gun Violence in Schools* on April 20, 2018. Some activities for either date may include:

- Organized Adult Supervised Walkouts
- Walk Through the Building, not Outside
- Essays
- Letters to Parkland students, staff, administrators
- Artwork
- Assembly Programs
- 17 Acts of Kindness
- What's your 17?
 - Make friends with 17 students you ordinarily wouldn't
 - Smile at 17 people you ordinarily wouldn't smile at
 - Say a kind word to 17 people
 - Open your heart and reach out to 17 people who might be hurting
 - Offer friendship to 17 people who may not have friends

- 17 reasons for change
- 17 reasons to make a difference
- Write 17 letters to your Congressman, Senators, Assemblymen, etc.

I believe that these are teachable moments that will provide our students with a voice and plant the seeds of active civic engagement.

As it relates to Paterson Public Schools' readiness in times of crisis, I want to assure you that our district takes any crisis or threat to a particular school very seriously. Throughout the school year, we practice various safety drills (including Active Shooter and Lock-down drills) to ensure that our students, faculty, and staff are well-prepared to respond to any emergency situation.

Our standard practices include:

- Working with law enforcement to assist and conduct thorough investigations
- Training teachers and staff on how to safely and quickly conduct safety responses
- Ensuring that each school has an "Incident Commander" – generally the School Principal – who will enact an appropriate response to the crisis situation
- Notifying Emergency First Responders to assist when necessary, in the orderly and safe evacuation of a school building and to follow set policies for the crisis situation.

Additionally, we have begun to take steps including further review of access to buildings, public address systems and security cameras.

Again, the safety of our children and staff is our top priority which is why **we need everyone's diligence in following the "if you see something, say something" rule. This is critically important.**

Please talk with your children and ask them now and periodically, if they are hearing about any threats in school or on social media. Also, let them know that comments made by any student regarding possible shootings or threats of any kind will be treated severely. We have a strong Security Department and an excellent relationship with our City of Paterson Police Department. Together we will immediately address any concerns brought to our attention.

Remember, if we work together to play an active role in keeping our schools safe, then I know, together we can!

Please do not hesitate to contact my office if you have any questions.

Thank you.



Eileen F. Shafer
State District Superintendent