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ONSLOW
COUNTY
SCHOOLS



Superintendent

Barry D. Collins, Ed.D.

PSA

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JOINT STATEMENT ON SCHOOL SAFETY

Thursday, May 26, 2022 – Recent national events have brought school safety to the attention of our community. In the aftermath of the horrific school shooting at Robb Elementary School, we mourn those who lost their lives and join the rest of the nation in keeping the students, staff, families and entire community of Uvalde, Texas in our thoughts and prayers.

Onslow County Schools, the Onslow County Sherriff's Office, and the Jacksonville Department of Public Safety agree there is no higher priority for our community than the safety and security of our students, staff, and citizens. Teachers cannot teach effectively if they do not feel safe. Students cannot learn if they are constantly worried about their safety. Parents will not feel comfortable sending their children to school if they are concerned about whether they will come home safely at the end of the day.

Onslow County Schools is proud of our partnerships with our local law enforcement agencies and the strong relationships we have built focused on school safety. Our organizations are in constant communication and consistently work together to ensure our school facilities are protected and that processes and procedures are in place to ensure we are doing all we can to provide for the safety and security of our students and staff.

Our partnerships with the Sheriff's Office and Jacksonville Police Department have allowed the school system to provide resource officers at all schools. OCS middle and high schools have full-time school resource officers, and our elementary schools share one SRO per two schools. Every school has a safety plan which has been customized for the unique needs of each campus and involves training on specific practices for students and staff. This includes regular drills which are conducted on each campus to prepare staff and students for potential incidents.

OCS has made a commitment to increasing the physical security of our facilities, including swipe card access for staff entry and "doorbell systems" for visitors. After being granted entrance to a school facility, visitors must sign in with an ID which provides an instant background check and detailed record of those coming to any campus.

The district also utilizes the Say Something Anonymous Reporting system, which allows reporting of incidents – or threats of potential incidents – 24/7/365 with a live response and notification of district and school teams for immediate follow-up.

In addition to these physical safety measures, OCS has put an emphasis on promoting the mental health and emotional well-being of our school community. Through an investment in

school counselors, nurses, and social workers, as well as community partnerships with mental health providers, OCS has implemented a districtwide mental health plan, which works to provide support for students facing mental and behavioral challenges.

OCS Superintendent Dr. Barry Collins stated, "OCS staff are here to help and have no higher priority than making sure our students feel safe learning in our buildings. We are extremely fortunate to have a strong, positive working relationship with Sheriff Hans Miller and his department, and with the Jacksonville Police Department, under the leadership of Chief Mike Yaniero. We will continue to work closely with these organizations and will explore every option and consider every possibility to make our campuses even safer." Dr. Collins also shared, "Being a father myself, I understand the pain those who lost children in Uvalde are feeling and the concerns here which come in the wake of such a tragedy. I would reassure our school community that safety is our highest concern and encourage families to have open conversations about recent events and, if needed, seek out additional resources available through our school counselors and social workers."

Similarly, the Jacksonville Police Department has taken several proactive measures to prevent these kinds of incidents from occurring. This includes the establishment several years ago of threat assessment teams. These teams are intended to intervene before a person commits an act of violence. In speaking about the importance of these teams, Jacksonville Department of Public Safety Chief Mike Yaniero feels, "Early intervention is key to addressing potential violent behavior and to providing students with appropriate treatment."

Another measure taken by JPD includes establishing active shooter plans and training on these plans with community partners. "Planning and preparation are key to ensuring an effective response if an incident of gun violence does occur on school grounds. In both these events, this process allows for reduced probability of a violent event," Yaniero added. "Even with these programs and processes, JPD continues to work with our partners at OCS, community members, and our partner law enforcement agencies, like OCSO, to ensure our schools are a safe haven for our most precious resource, our children."

In response to Tuesday's incident, the Onslow County Sheriff's Office has asked their officers to increase visibility on school campuses across the board. Sheriff Hans Miller said, "We put the word out to our regular zone patrol officers yesterday, to encourage them to visit any school in their regular patrol zone, park their marked patrol vehicle in front of the school, check in at the front office and – if calls for service allow – walk the campuses with staff or the assigned SRO."

Dr. Barry Collins,
Superintendent, Onslow
County Schools

Chief Mike Yaniero,
Jacksonville Department of
Public Safety

Sheriff Hans Miller,
Onslow County Sheriff's
Office

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