



ESTANCIA MUNICIPAL SCHOOLS

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Superintendent

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August 30, 2019

Dear Parents,

I'd like to follow up with you regarding the emergency evacuation of Middle and High School students to the Elementary campus yesterday, August 29th. As I was able to relay in the brief phone and email communication, a suspicious device was found in a parking lot on the high school campus. The device had a cap, a fuse, was in a metal tube, was packed, and wrapped with tape. Upon inspection by Police and Sheriff Department agents, a determination was made that the device posed a real and credible threat to the safety of students on the school campus. A perimeter was established, and all staff and students were evacuated to a safe zone located outside of the perimeter. Law enforcement then divided into two teams; one team was charged with sweeping the campus (fields, parking areas, transportation yard, playgrounds, walking paths, and school buildings) for other potential devices. The second team, comprised of the State Police Bomb Squad, focused on the removal, inspection, and disarming of the device, which was shown to contain incendiary materials. The device was secured and taken off campus while the grounds and building inspection was completed. To be safe and thorough, this took time. The evacuation was initiated and a call sent out to notify parents at 11:15 a.m. The campus was cleared and students returned to the Middle and High Schools at 2:30, and a follow up phone call to parents made at 2:32 p.m. Our records show 562 phone calls were answered in 3 minutes and 19 seconds of sending out the first phone message, and 543 phone calls were answered in 3 minutes and 11 seconds of sending out the second message. 456 emails were delivered with the same message in the morning, and 457 emails were similarly delivered in the afternoon.

The safety of students is always the primary goal in situations like this, followed closely by timely and accurate communication. I was extremely proud of our staff who responded quickly, professionally, and thoughtfully to this crisis yesterday. ALL students were accounted for, supervised, fed, and provided emotional support as needed. Students did a great job following directions, even in some unfavorable conditions. Communication was delayed longer than I was comfortable with in the afternoon, and I apologize for any undue stress this caused families. I have talked with principals about encouraging teachers to use their classroom dojo communication as a way to update families with classroom relevant messages in the future, and hope that helps.

Please be assured that there will be a stronger law enforcement presence on and around campus over the next few weeks. As well, staff are alert to suspicious activity and/or additional devices. The grounds and facilities are being carefully looked over daily. As well, we will be taking additional security measures, such as more cameras and motion activated lights. You will appreciate that school safety has been an ongoing discussion at school and with the Board of Education for the last several weeks. For this reason, on Wednesday evening, the night before the "event," the Board of Education approved the hiring of a School Security Guard, who will be present each day, in the absence of a full time School Resource Officer. As well, staff will be participating in two school safety trainings, already scheduled to occur in October. Because we prioritize school safety, you will notice new procedures in place over the next few weeks for picking up your students and visiting our campuses during the school day. We want all parents and visitors to feel welcome to our schools! We also want to ensure the safety of our students and staff, and preserve instruction at all times. You will be receiving additional information about these new procedures in the coming weeks. Thank you for your trust, patience, and support as we work out these new systems together.

Please do not hesitate to call if you have any questions or concerns. I am happy to hear from you!

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