



RIDGEFIELD PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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Susie Da Silva, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools

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Dear Families and Faculty,

I write this mid-week letter as recent national and local events have brought to light real threats happening in and out of schools. While some threats may not be deemed credible, their impact is. Any threat to the safety of our students and faculty is taken seriously and will be treated as such.

Our school staff engages in proactive training and professional development, as well as reactive. We have resources available in our schools to help with both of these approaches. As a district we are committed to being as proactive as possible. We do this through the support of our administrators, school psychologists, social workers, nurses, school counselors, crisis teams, School Resource Officers, and educators. We have tools that are used daily, such as Responsive Classroom, Restorative Practices, and RULER to proactively provide students with language and strategies to help manage their emotions and work through difficult situations. We use resources available to us through 211 Mobile Crisis Services, *Kids in Crisis*, and other social service agencies to provide services/referrals outside the school day to the students or families in need.

More often than may be believed, we learn that members of our school community may threaten harm to themselves and/or to others. Similarly, most often these threats are not credible. Whether these individuals are making these threats for the purpose of attention-seeking, joking, or perhaps an emotional issue, we treat them as credible and engage our active school climate teams, as well as our climate and/or security plans. When we learn of any threat or potential threat to our schools, students or staff, we respond swiftly and collaboratively. Any threat, regardless of intention, location, person, or age, is treated as credible and is investigated thoroughly. In addition to our school-based teams, the police department and/or our School Resource Officers are actively involved throughout the process.

In addition to consequences that may include arrest, suspension and/or expulsion, students who make statements or take actions that threaten the safety of the school may be referred for a risk-assessment prior to re-entry to school. Again, our first priority is the safety and well-being of our school communities.

There is something that we can do. We can partner together.

We can:

- Remind children that it is not “tattling” or “snitching” to inform an adult at school or home when they see or hear anything of concern.

- Reinforce that words convey meaning - when you say or write something, it can be interpreted literally.
- Be aware that any threat of violence can lead to consequences that can have a long-lasting impact.
- Remind children that school staff are here to help. There are trusted adults across our schools that are willing to walk alongside them.
- Stay tuned into their social media accounts-what is said or conveyed. Parent and caregiver vigilance, open conversations and trust can make a difference. When hurtful messages/photos are sent, the damage can be permanent.
- Create trusting relationships - and talk, talk, talk.
- Reinforce access to the resources available at school and in the community.
- Watch for signs such as anxiety, depression, behavioral changes, sadness.

In my Friday communication, I reminded our school community that colleagues, neighbors, friends, and the community are here to help, without judgment. Please join me in reaching out to those who you may see struggling- whether acute or long-term. The journey of life, while beautiful, is not perfect. It comes with bumps, moments, and hurdles that may feel, at times, impossible to overcome. We can walk alongside one another, and step by step get through even the most difficult of situations.

Before students can learn, before we can teach- we must feel emotionally and mentally safe and healthy. Mental health can not be overlooked. Raising awareness and erasing the stigma around mental health is critical in this journey. There are resources available to help adults and children. Life is complicated, and the path isn't straight for most. Reach out for help.

Below are organizations and resources locally available to families who are in need. Any family who would like to have a conversation regarding utilization of mental health supports, please do not hesitate to connect with your school administrator.

National Alliance on Mental Illness: <https://namict.org/>

Kids in Crisis: <https://www.kidsin crisis.org/>

Child Health and Development Institute of CT: <https://www.chdi.org/>

Department of Children and Families, Community-Based Mental Health Services: <https://portal.ct.gov/DCF/Community-Mental-Health-Services/Home#CMHIR>

RPS will be offering open sessions for parents and caregivers on the topic of mental health awareness after the New Year. We encourage any and all to join. Stay tuned for information about these events in the coming weeks.

Sincerely,

Susie

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