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Christy Perry, Superintendent

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TO: Administrators
Behavior Specialists
School Counselors
School Psychologists
Social Workers
School Resource Officers

FROM: John Van Dreal, Director, Safety and Risk Management Services
Courtenay McCarthy, School Psychologist, Threat Response, Student Services
Shelley Rutledge, School Psychologist, Threat Response, Student Services
Ray Byrd, Security Supervisor, Safety and Risk Management Services
Darcie Jones, Counseling Program Associate, Student Services

RE: VIOLENCE IN THE SCHOOLS

The recent, well-publicized incidents of targeted violence across the country have raised concerns within our own district staff, students, and parents. While our district has been calm, we would like to remind you to be watchful and cautious when considering all situations that may pose a risk of violence. Furthermore, when discussing the recent events of violence, we suggest prudence and a careful consideration of facts.

Attached below is a list of risk factors for your review when examining situations of potential risk. (As you know, we have a threat assessment process that can be engaged at any time, and we are always available for consultation.) We have also provided speaking points for discussing violent events with concerned staff, students, and parents. If you are approached by media, please contact the Communications Department at 503-399-3038 prior to any discussion. If that is not possible and you must respond, media speaking points are also provided at the end of this memo.

To contact us please call one of the following numbers:

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Risk Factors
(associated with targeted violence)

The following is a partial list of actions, behaviors and circumstances that may indicate greater risk for targeted violence. Please be mindful of this list as you monitor your students and the situations they are involved in. If you have concerns of imminent danger, contact Law Enforcement immediately.

1. **Has there been a shift toward a threat of extreme aggression or violence?** Violence is aggressive behavior that is intended to cause, or results in, serious or lethal injury.
2. **Have there been threatening communications suggesting a potential violent attack?** Is the communication an expression that suggests details of planning or ongoing consideration of an attack? Communications may include verbal expressions, artwork, email, Internet messaging, texting, written language exercises, or any other medium of communication. A communication can also be made by indirect, veiled, or casual references to possible harmful events, warnings of potential harm or references to previously occurring violent events such as school or community shootings.
3. **Are there indications of a specific target or targets?** Is there an ongoing consideration or focus on a particular person or a group of people?
4. **Are there indications of a motive, goal or justification for a serious or lethal attack?** While there can certainly be many motives for acting out violently or aggressively, the most common is the need to establish or re-establish control. This is often disguised as revenge, humiliation, or the desire to prove bravery after making a threat or taking a dare. Pay close attention to motive themes of loss and injustice.
5. **Are there any indications of behavior that increase the possibility of violence occurring?** Such indications may include a plan, acquiring weapons, rehearsing, practicing the attack, scheduling the attack, or other preparations. A communication that threatens an attack is only an expression and does not suggest a “posed threat” unless there are behaviors supporting the intent to carry out the attack. Many threats are not stated with clearly expressed language but are indicated by veiled threats and/or behavior that relates to a possible attack. Attack related behavior includes, but is not limited to, the following:
 - A plan to carry out a targeted act of aggression against a specific individual or group. A plan would have a sequence of actions necessary for its success. The more plausible the plan the greater the risk.
 - The acquisition of a weapon, the attempted acquisition of a weapon, or research about how to acquire a weapon. If the threat is the use of physical force to the point of serious or lethal injury, then the physical force is the weapon.
 - The rehearsal of the event or a similar event. Rehearsal is like simulation or practice. Rehearsal can be indicated through art, fantasy games, writing, film projects, or other opportunities that allow role play or practice. It can also be indicated by the use of movies, Internet sites, or video games that have themes and sequences of violence that can serve as

a simulation or practice. However, the use of such games or films as entertainment does not lead or cause students to act out violently unless it also serves as rehearsal or practice.

- Scheduling an attack. Scheduling can be indicated through vague communication or thoroughly noted detail. Sometimes the schedule is flexible, awaiting a triggering event (teasing, rejection, loss) that further justifies the violence and locks it in as the only solution.

6. **Are actions and behaviors consistent with communications?** If threats are made but not accompanied by attack-related behaviors, motives, or a specific target(s) consistent with that threat, then the risk decreases.
7. **Is there peer collaboration?** Are peers aware of (or concerned about) a potential attack? Are peers encouraging the attack?
8. **Are alternatives and emotional coping reserves low or decreasing?** For example, a person who is low on coping strategies or alternatives may consider violence to be the only option available to solve problems.
9. **Are there indications of suicidal thoughts?** Is there a history of suicidal ideation, gestures, references, or intent? A desire to die, be killed by another person, or commit suicide, combined with a threat to harm others, increases the overall risk. This is especially true if the suicidal behavior is one feature of a plan to kill others and carry out revenge or justice. If there is a risk of suicide, pursue a Suicide Risk Assessment or seek advice and/or assessment from a doctor or mental health professional.
10. **Are there personality or behavioral traits, family dynamics, school system issues, or social dynamics that lead to a more vulnerable and potentially dangerous situation?** Reckless and vindictive behavior, family dysfunction, academic failure, and social crisis are all risk factors that can aggravate an already at-risk situation.

*Speaking Points
(for addressing student and parent concerns)*

Before talking with staff, parents, or students, be aware of your own feelings and be prepared to manage them. You will set the tone for the school community. Students will look to adults for cues about appropriate responses and they will base their behavior on what the role-model provides. The following suggestions will help students feel safe and help maintain school equilibrium.

1. Be caring and compassionate for ALL involved. If people want to discuss the event, help them focus on facts, not rumors.
2. People are often most concerned about safety. Highlight that most adults are safe and trustworthy. Discuss all of the safety procedures the district uses to help maintain a safe environment and keep students safe.
3. Share details as they are represented in the newspaper or given to you. Steer people away from speculation, rumors, blame, etc. Address gossip firmly but not punitively.

4. Be aware that there may be students and possibly staff for whom this brings up memories of other losses. This is common. Help them remember the coping strategies that have worked in the past.
5. They may need support from their school counselor or a referral to a community agency. Utilize our counseling staff for student concerns. For staff, consider referring to the Employee Assistance Plan. For parents, provide contact information to community resources.
6. Help people identify the people in their lives who provide support. Encourage them talk with one or more of these trusted individuals.
7. Clarify your role as someone who is available for them to talk to. Help them feel that school is a safe place for them to share their feelings, concerns, fears, and grief.
8. Let students tell you their needs. Address those needs, and then encourage them to get back into their routine and move forward. Help them understand that while this is a challenging time, they have a future and a path to stay on. Assure them that you will assist them as they move down that path.
9. For people who are survivors of violent incidents, simply helping them feel welcomed within the school environment is sometimes the most supportive action you can provide.
10. The greatest gift is to LISTEN, and listen some more! Avoid becoming an instant therapist.

Speaking Points
(for media, newsletters and/or social media)

“We have systems in place to prevent and prepare for acts of violence. Whenever a tragedy occurs, we look for the safety lessons that could apply to our schools. However, this analysis really cannot begin until the facts of the case are released. When the facts are known, local, state, and national safety experts and law enforcement will help us process the information and determine if there are lessons we can learn from the tragedy. In the meantime, we will continue with our procedures which are drawn from leading practices and the lessons learned from prior incidents.”