

Hastings-on-Hudson Public Schools



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Dear Hastings Families and Staff,

I am writing with additional information on the security situation today that led to the Lockdown at the Farragut Complex and the two-hour delay to the start of school. I will share items specific to this situation. I will also underscore more general security issues, which today reminds us must be understood by students, families and staff.

To Review

Just prior to the start of the school day this morning, we were notified of an alleged threat to the Farragut Complex (middle school and high school), which was posted on social media. The Hastings Police Department (HPD) immediately responded to the scene and conducted an investigation that resulted in the school being deemed safe.

Police Visibility

As is standard practice, the HPD were visible in and around the Farragut Complex today. This is to help reassure students and staff of their safety. While there was never a threat to Hillside, the HPD were also visible outside the school today.

Lockdown

The security situation became apparent at roughly 7:30 a.m. just as some students and staff were arriving at school. In accordance with our emergency management protocols, a Lockdown of those students and staff in the building was initiated, given we were unsure if there was an imminent threat in the building at the time of the social media threat. We then added a two-hour delay to prevent additional staff and students from arriving at the school. Those students who had arrived, and were outside with the Lockdown, were directed to return home. The normal assembly locations for students and staff in emergencies were not used in this case due to the timing of the situation (just before school with students and staff arriving sporadically). We are reviewing these procedures with the district safety consultants and HPD.

Police assisted our school administrators with the systematic process of releasing all building occupants from the Lockdown, and confirming attendance. The use of the Lockdown protocol as well as the release process is something that our schools practice on a regular basis. Our staff and students did a wonderful job as we have come to expect.

Emotional and Psychological Support

We are fortunate to have robust, professional support systems within our schools. Administrators, teachers, psychologists, social workers and counselors are being extra attentive to students or staff struggling in any way as a result of today's security situation. We will continue to pay close attention in the near future.

Communication Content and Pace

In emergency situations, we aim to communicate what we know at a given moment as quickly as possible, with the intent to follow up when other essential information becomes known. This morning, the first communication had to focus on the move to a Lockdown and then the two-hour delay. We could not take time to explain the reasons for the security steps while we were sorting out whether the threat was real. Later in the morning, when we had clarity on the facts and knew that safety and security was assured, a district-wide statement provided a more detailed account. By design, a second update went out early in the afternoon from the High School and Middle School about what had been shared with students and staff with regard to safety. Lastly, again by design, this second, more lengthy, district-wide statement is being provided. More updates will be sent over the next several days if necessary.

Social Media Posts

Schools across the country continue to deal with an unprecedented number of non-credible threats posted on social media. Please be aware that all comments that directly or indirectly suggest a threat to the safety and security of our school populations are taken seriously. Any such statement comes with significant consequences, even if they are made jokingly and/or are deemed as not being credible. We urge all parents to monitor their child(ren)'s social media accounts. Please inform a school administrator or teacher if you come across any concerning material. We need to know as early as possible about potential concerns. Information is treated as confidential and we work with risk assessment experts to assess the situation.

Security Partners

We have established excellent relationships with the HPD and Hastings Fire Department. Today, the HPD responded immediately and worked seamlessly with our administrators and security personnel to assess and manage the situation. We also benefit from the guidance of Altaris, a security consulting firm, who sent two professionals to campus this morning to be of assistance. HPD and Altaris already are conducting post-action analysis with the administration so we understand what worked well and identify areas for improvement.

Final Word

We place the safety of all students and staff as a top priority and recognize the need to be transparent regarding incidents that may impact our school community. We will always act out of an abundance of caution to ensure all students and staff are safe, both inside and outside of our buildings.

Sincerely,

Bill

William S. McKersie, Ph.D.
Superintendent