



September 28, 2017

Dear Community Members,

While we are confident in the safety and security of our schools and appreciate the partnership and support from the Waltham Police Department, we join you in feeling anxious and unsettled about the recent bomb threats against our community. We also understand why many feel that the City is being targeted with these latest threats even though we also understand that the WPD has an active and ongoing investigation. The purpose of this letter is to share resources, tools and information that you can use to support your child(ren) if they are experiencing anxiety during this time.

Current Investments

I want to share the investments that the Waltham Public Schools have made to support students' social and emotional wellness. These investments include:

- **Counselors**: We have full-time adjustment counselor(s) at each of our schools. At Waltham High School, we have a team of 5 adjustment counselors and, in addition, 6.5 FTE dedicated guidance counselors who can also support students' academic and social needs. At the middle schools, we also have a team of guidance and adjustment counselors at each school. Our elementary schools all have a full-time adjustment counselor who can support the social and emotional needs of our students. We also have bilingual counselors at each level. We are proud and fortunate that the City and School Committee have agreed to this level of service that is unlike many communities. As many of you know, we have an extremely strong cadre of school-based counselors and they are ready and able to support children and families.
- **School Nurses**: Many communities also do not have full-time nurses. We are fortunate that the City and the School Committee continue to invest in full-time nurse(s) at each of our schools. While their primary work is to support the health needs of our students, our expert school nurses are also available to work in collaboration with our school leadership and counselors to support social and emotional wellness.
- **Crisis/Student Support Teams**: All of our schools have teams of educators who are dedicated to meeting to address culture, climate, social-emotional and academic needs. Their work, in part, is to monitor and support students who might need additional resources.
- **Social-Emotional Curriculum**: Waltham Public Schools has a K-5 social-emotional curriculum
- **Project Interface**: The Waltham Public Schools and Waltham Partnership for Youth fund access for Waltham Public Schools families to a service called Project Interface, which connects families and students to local counseling services. You can find a link and phone number below.

All Waltham Public Schools students have access to these resources and we encourage you to support your child(ren) to use them when needed.



Key Messages

Research on communities who have past targets of threats such as the ones we are experiencing in Waltham suggest that it is important that students of all ages hear some information from adults in their home during these times:

- You believe that they are safe at school
- You have confidence in the Waltham Police Department and the educators at your school who will make decisions in the best interest of the children
- You know that there are resources available if your child(ren) need them that can be accessed through a school administrator and/or counselor
- Be cognizant that our children model their reactions from adults so it is important to stay calm and stick to normal routines. If children notice worry, they will feel worried as well. If adults change normal routines, they will notice and wonder why things are changing.
- Keep the lines of communication open with your child(ren): It is important to ask your children how they are feeling and allow them to guide what information they need/want to know. While the adults are not talking about the bomb threats in our schools, we know that children will hear things in the community or on social media, which may prompt questions. You should answer questions honestly and choose words that work to minimize anxiety. You want to validate the feelings of your child(ren). Statements like: “I know you feel worried. I felt worried too when I learned of the threat. My heart started to beat faster and then I thought what confidence I have in the Waltham Police Department, your principal and the team of educators at your school and I knew you were safe.”

Tools and Resources

- Resource from Harvard Graduate School of Education to talk to students when bad things happen: <https://www.gse.harvard.edu/news/uk/15/04/when-bad-things-happen>
- Resource from Families magazine on how to talk to children about bomb threats and evacuations: <https://www.familiesmagazine.com.au/how-to-talk-to-kids-about-school-evacuations/>
- Resource from *Parenting* about how to talk to children about threats: <http://www.parents.com/parenting/better-parenting/advice/how-to-talk-to-kids-about-terrorism/>

Additional resources on how to engage in positive dialogue with your children to support their happiness and positive development:

- <http://time.com/35496/how-to-raise-happy-kids-10-steps-backed-by-science/>
- <http://www.momtastic.com/health/587411-anxious-stop-worrying-much-keep-kids-worriers/>



Emergency Resources

In the event that you feel you need additional resources beyond what we have shared in this letter, I provide two community resources that might be able to support you or your child if you feel that you need more immediate and urgent guidance:

- Advocates (crisis line)-[\(781\) 893-2003](tel:7818932003)
- Project Interface (counseling resource)-[\(617\) 332-3666](tel:6173323666)
<https://interface.williamjames.edu/>

Please do not hesitate to reach out to your child(ren)'s principal and/or the counselors at your child(ren)'s school if you need or want additional guidance in these important matters. Waltham Public Schools educators are important resources and I encourage you to access them.

Drew M. Echelson
Superintendent