

# Sedgwick Elementary School

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Dear Parents and Community Members,

As a parent, a school teacher, and an administrator, I am still reeling from the awful events of last Monday morning at Virginia Tech. Once again, children have been murdered in what should be the safest of places: their school. As I watched the coverage of the events last week, I was reminded once again of the obligation that schools have to protect children, inform their parents, and assure their communities that they are doing all they can to make sure that if such events occur they are prepared to handle them.

Earlier in the school year, the staff and I reviewed different aspects of our crisis management plan. Because of school shootings at rural schools in the fall, we paid particular attention to how we planned to handle the 'intruder in the building' or the 'intruder on campus' scenarios. On a workshop day in the fall, without children present, we carried out an intruder drill, reviewed the action, and made changes. Shortly, thereafter, we had an actual situation that caused us to be ready to implement the lockdown procedure. Fortunately, we did not have to do so.

I mention this because I want the community to know that your school has a plan in place to deal with this awful possibility. That plan includes a lockdown procedure. It includes specific actions teachers are supposed to take. It includes ways to communicate with the classrooms and ways to communicate with parents. While it is not foolproof and in a constant state of improvement, it does allow us a common course of action in what would be a very difficult moment. At present, we have no plans to practice an 'intruder drill' with children present. To do so would probably unnecessarily frighten children and not serve any real purpose. We will also not reveal our plan with any real specificity. To do so would make things less safe for our kids and staff.

I cannot guarantee that our school is any safer than any other school in the country. Once upon a time, we could honestly say that such things couldn't happen here. Unfortunately, we know better. Such things do happen in places just like this. I can assure you however that we take our obligation to make sure your children are safe as our very highest priority and that we will continue to work to make sure our school is as secure as we can make it.

After viewing some of the wall to wall coverage of the tragedy at Virginia Tech and visiting my own college age children at their schools last week, I can only add that as a parent, it was helpful to me and my kids to talk about these events and not just sit and let them play them out in their heads. Assure your children that school is a safe place for them and that their teachers are looking out for them. Give them a hug and tell them that while there are terrible things that happen in the world, you are there to protect them. Dwell on all the positive relationships they have with their friends, family, church, and teachers. Turn off the TV, the video games, the Game Boys and talk about what they are afraid of. You may not have all the answers they want, but by talking to them you will help them understand that you are there for them.

These are difficult times in which to be raising children. If we struggle to make sense of this, imagine how hard it is for them. As ever, I am available to talk with any of you about this situation and hear your questions or suggestions about school security issues.

Sincerely,

Don Buckingham