



OFFICE FOR CATHOLIC SCHOOLS
DIOCESE OF GREENSBURG

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Dear Parents and Guardians,

The recent events in schools have caused concern among all of us as we wonder what is happening in our society. While we continue to pray for the victims of senseless violence, we ask God for help and guidance in the wake of continuing threats in schools across the nation.

I want to assure you that the safety of your children is extremely important to everyone in the diocese and all school personnel take their responsibility for the safety of your children very seriously. In fact, school personnel throughout the diocese have been engaging in safety training sessions for many years. As we plan and prepare, we hope and pray that we never have to implement these plans.

Every Catholic school in our diocese has emergency plans in place that will continue to be reviewed and updated as advised by safety specialists. Some parents have asked principals to share the plans, but in the interest of the security of our staff and students, we cannot provide specific details of our emergency plans. However, I am able to share with you some of the recent trainings in which administrators, teachers and some staff members from the Diocese of Greensburg have engaged.

In cooperation with the police, emergency management organizations, and a variety of safety specialists, school personnel have practiced theoretical simulations during the process of developing safety plans for each of the schools. They have taken "Stop the Bleed" first aid training in conjunction with gun recognition education. Additionally, representatives from every school have taken the foundation course from the FEMA Emergency Management Institute titled "Introduction to Incident Command System." Most importantly, schools have implemented or updated their student assistance programs to help all students who are struggling with educational or emotional issues.

Our facilities have been assessed for safety by the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency which will be issuing a report to each school with suggestions for improvement. Currently, all of our Catholic schools have secure entrances with electronic access systems. Students have been educated on the importance of keeping doors closed and not admitting visitors when they see them at an entrance. Please reinforce this with them at home. Children are very polite and trusting. It is difficult for them to act against their nature.

To ensure preparedness for emergencies, students, teachers, administrators and staff regularly participate in a variety of safety drills to test the validity of their emergency preparedness plans and to record their response times. The more they practice drills, the easier it will be for them to remember the directions in an emergency situation. Please know that every attempt is made to explain the drills to the students in an age-appropriate manner. If your child is struggling with any aspect of the drills, please inform the principal of your school.

While schools focus on the safety procedures that they can control, it is important to recognize that everyone plays a critical role in school safety. Students, school personnel and the community are encouraged to be observant and let a school official or police officer know if they see or hear something that makes them feel uncomfortable, nervous, or frightened-especially if they hear threats of dangerous behavior. Advise your child that there is no tolerance for jokes about school safety and that even remarks considered as a joke by an individual will have serious repercussions not only with the school, but with the police as well.

Finally, you might be aware that a nation-wide walkout of students against violence is planned for March 14. While we abhor violence, we believe that strength and unity against violence in our schools can be addressed significantly through praying together as a school community. Consequently, every Catholic school in our diocese will be holding a prayer opportunity as a safe alternative to this walkout. This will demonstrate solidarity among students and provide an opportunity for every school community to pray for the lives lost to school violence.

I want to assure you that we consider your child's safety our sacred responsibility. Let us pray together for an end to all violence and a peaceful future for all of God's children.

May God bless you and your loved ones,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Maureen Marsteller". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Maureen G. Marsteller, Ph.D.
Superintendent for Catholic Schools