

Dear Newhall Elementary School District (NSD) Parents and Guardians,

School safety is a priority for our schools and recent local and national events have highlighted that importance. The focus has led to worrisome thoughts and conversations by students, parents, and communities. I want to share what we do in our schools when we receive information that threatens the safety of our students or staff as well as what we can all do to make our schools safer.

NSD have a long standing partnership with the Santa Clarita Valley Sheriff's Department to provide access to School Resource Officers (SROs) when needed. Last school year, we started conducting lockdown drills and providing our sites with feedback to affirm and improve our safety practices and this year we plan to continue these drills. This partnership with the Sheriff's is valuable and provides opportunities to practice these drills with them as First Responders.

In addition to the close working relationship with the Sheriff, this year we completed fencing projects at all our school sites not previously fenced. In addition, all sites now have a Visitor Management System called LobbyGuard which we have previously communicated with you about. All sites also have a Video Entry Camera System which helps monitor and track all visitors during the school day. Gates are locked during the school day and all visitors and volunteers are required to sign in at the school office.

At NSD, our teachers instruct their students to ensure that safety drills and protocols are understood and followed. Together, our teachers, administrators and staff keep up to date on safety measures and are consistently vigilant about safety and security on their sites. Our teachers talk to and listen to children regarding any safety concerns and follow up with parents and guardians to discuss further when necessary. Additionally, many of our administrators and staff members have their own children in our classrooms.

Administrators at sites are experienced in investigating concerns of safety and threats of harm to our students and are trained in school safety protocols. Our responses are not exactly the same for every child nor for every comment made. The age of the child and the nature of the comments are considered, investigated and consequences determined based on various factors and particular circumstance.

One of the greatest challenges for administrators is sifting quickly through the incredible volume of information related to a potential threat. When people are concerned, they sometimes inadvertently post misinformation on-line through Twitter, Facebook, Snapchat, etc. and social media that actually makes the job of the school administrators much more challenging.

You, as parents and guardians, are part of the most effective resources we have for helping your children be safe at school. Those resources include strong two-way communication; reporting any threat of harm toward students to the school, law enforcement, or both; and using reasonable protocols together to create an environment that reassures our students that they are safe to learn.

Below are behaviors and roles we can each utilize to create the safest possible schools.

Administrators and School Staff:

- Always listen to students, parents and others when a threat is reported. No threat is ignored.
- Always thoroughly investigate each threat even when the student says "I was joking" or "They knew I was kidding around" or "I was just trying to be funny."

- Communicate with the Santa Clarita Valley Sheriff's Department in an ongoing manner throughout any threat of harm to students.
- Investigate each element of the threat to obtain the truth. This can include reviewing social media postings, talking to students, talking to staff, talking to parents, etc.
- Communicate with parents as much information as is reasonable, respecting that our district employees will not discuss one parent's child with another parent.
 - The parent of the student making the inappropriate or threatening remark will usually be contacted first as their child will be removed from the school or separated from the student body while the investigation is being conducted.
 - During the investigation, the priority is safety. Parents may not be contacted before their children visit with administrators if time is of the essence. Safety, again, is the first priority. However, if your child is witness to a threat and talked to specifically about that threat, every effort will be made to contact you about that discussion even if it is the next day due to time constraints.
- Provide consequences to students who make remarks or threats that substantially disrupt the school environment and lead to unsafe conditions for learning. This discipline can include removal from the traditional school setting in keeping with California Education Code.
- Honor students who have been a part of the effort to make our schools safe by telling their parents or their school leaders.
- Cooperate with the Santa Clarita Valley Sheriff's Department if threats result in any further action.
- On a regular, on-going basis our administrators have been educating and will continue to educate students regarding inappropriate remarks, threatening comments, etc. and the seriousness of those remarks in a school setting.

Parents and Legal Guardians:

- Please remind your children that they have a right to a safe school and an outstanding education. Also remind them that they are exceptionally valuable, so telling an adult at school when they hear something is reporting and not tattling. Tattling is when you are trying to get someone in trouble. Reporting is when you are trying to make things better.
- Please listen to your children's comments and monitor their social-media posts. If you are aware of something that could threaten the safety of your child or another child, please contact the school administrator and/or Santa Clarita Valley Sheriff's Department. We work hand-in-hand and will notify each other of the threat or safety concern.
- Please redirect your children if you see a pattern of negative gossip or disruptive comments that could carry over into school.
- Please praise your child when they are making wise choices about social media and are choosing not to participate in disruptive/negative/intimidating comments or social media posts.
- Please make every effort to not post information on social media or share it with others related to school safety unless you are positive it is fact. Misinformation shared by parents or citizens outside the school actually makes the school more unsafe as the administrators have to investigate that information as well as the information that is going on inside the school.
- If, after visiting with your child's teacher and/or principal, you have ongoing concerns about what is discussed in this letter, please don't hesitate to call me directly.
- Please review the items below with your students.

Students:

- Remember that it is your school. You deserve to be safe at school and your parents and school staff are working together to that end.

- What you say, as a student, is taken seriously by the adults in your life. If you hear that something is unsafe or another student is going to hurt someone: tell your parent or tell an adult at school.
- Students, just like adults, are held accountable when they say something that causes others to be afraid at school or unsafe at school. Serious consequences can result for a student who substantially disrupts a safe learning environment for other children through threatening remarks or comments.
- What you put on social media is the same as saying it out loud to a school administrator or to your parents. Even when posts are taken down, others take screenshots of them and they can resurface later. That is called a "digital footprint." You may think everyone in the chat room or everyone you are sharing the information with is your friend, however, when people become fearful, your deleted information may surface. Post wisely.
- If you see or hear anything that can make the school safer, tell the adult you trust most at school and have them share that with administrators or tell the administrator directly. Many incredible solutions for school safety come from the people who are at school every day - the students.

We collaborate as a team of administrators and district leaders to determine the best way to communicate with parents during a time of heightened concern. We want to keep parents up to date, but sharing information before an investigation is complete is unwise and could be a source of fear that is unnecessary. We are also aware that what is too much information for one parent may be inadequate information for another. We seek to find the appropriate balance when communicating.

Our site administrators send messages to you, from time to time, for various safety reasons. Examples include:

When a threat is being investigated, the challenge for an administrator is that the primary focus is on the threat. Each administrator will communicate in a way that meets the particular need. A few examples may include:

- "A fire alarm was accidentally pulled today. The building was evacuated and all students are safely in class."
- "Our school was on a "Lockdown" today as there was a law enforcement issue nearby. All students are safe in class."
- "Your child may discuss with you tonight that a concern was investigated at school today. There was no credible threat, but we are still making you aware."
- "A student made a remark today that was perceived as a threat. That was not the case, but we want to make you aware."
- "A student made a threatening remark today. We take those remarks seriously and the situation has been addressed."

We recognize the importance of continued communication because you have trusted us with your children. Thank you for reading this information and communicating with your children about it. The employees of Newhall School District are here to provide the highest quality education for your children in the safest possible environment.

Respectfully,

Jeff Pelzel
Superintendent of Schools