



Lopez Island School District #144

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Ed Murray, Superintendent

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December 8, 2021

Good Morning,

I appreciate many parents' concerns about our graffiti issue and what it represents. I want to thank those who have reached out to me or staff members. Concerning the current issue of bathroom graffiti, taking a specific action is very difficult without knowing the responsible student's identity. I want to reassure everyone that we have made law enforcement aware of this issue. Like us, there is very little they can do without knowing the individual responsible. We have procedures for conducting threat assessments related to individual students. We also have guidelines for conducting whole school threat assessments. We can only do the former if we identify a student of concern. The latter is a longer-term process for identifying security issues and enhancing security conditions on campus.

If parents are holding kids out of school because of safety concerns, I understand that we have to take steps to make sure you are comfortable sending your children to school. Closing the school is not an option at this point. The best option available to us is to listen to our students, identify students struggling emotionally or dealing with difficult situations, and provide all of our students with the resources and support they need to succeed. If anyone has a specific suggestion, we welcome the input.

Some actions we are or will be taking include:

1. We will emphasize the importance of listening in schools.

Pupils must listen respectfully to adults and their peers, and teachers, administrators, and other adults must listen respectfully to their students and each other.

2. We will take a firm but caring stance against the code of silence.

Silence leaves hurt unexposed and unacknowledged. Silence may encourage a young person to move along a path to violence.

3. We are working actively to ensure students continue to understand that talking to an adult about a student contemplating violence is not considered "snitching."

The Lopez Island School District does not discriminate in any programs or activities on the basis of sex, race, creed, religion, color, national origin, age, veteran or military status, sexual orientation, gender expression or identity, disability, or the use of a trained dog guide or service animal and provides equal access to the Boy Scouts and other designated youth groups. The following employee(s) has been designated to handle questions and complaints of alleged discrimination: Civil Rights Compliance Coordinator, Superintendent Ed Murray – emurray@lopezislandschool.org, Title IX Coordinator, HR Specialist Renee Koplan – rkoplan@lopezislandschool.org, Section 504 Academic Case Manager, K-12 Counselor Jeanna Carter – jcarter@lopezislandschool.org, Section 504 Health Care Case Manager, Karen Hattman, RN – khattman@lopezislandschool.org OR contact by phone, 360-468-2202, OR mail to 86 School Rd, Lopez Island, WA 98261.

A school climate in which students connect to each other and adults promotes a safe and secure educational environment. A student who finds the courage to tell a caring adult about a friend in pain may save a life.

4. We continue to promote anti-bullying efforts throughout our school environments.

In a safe school climate, adults do not bully students and do not bully each other—and they do not turn a blind eye to bullying behavior if they see it happening in the school.

5. We will empower students by involving them in planning, creating, and sustaining a school culture of safety and respect.

Creating a safe school climate is a process that should involve all members of the school community, including teachers, students, parents, counselors, administrators, health staff, security professionals, and support personnel. Climates of safety should be collaborative ones.

6. We will ensure that every student feels that they have a trusting relationship with at least one adult at school.

Trusting relationships between adults and students are the products of quality connection, interaction, and communications.

7. We are creating mechanisms for developing and sustaining safe school climates.

What should be done to develop and support climates of safety? To what extent are teachers, administrators, and other school staff encouraged to focus on students' social/emotional learning needs? How close is the school to achieving the goal of ensuring that every student feels that there is an adult to whom they can turn for talk, support, and advice if things get tough?

8. We are examining physical environments and their effects on creating comfort zones.

Building structure, facility safety plans, lighting, space, and architecture, among other physical attributes of educational institutions, all can contribute to whether a school environment feels, or is in fact, safe or unsafe.

9. We will emphasize an integrated systems model.

People support most what they believe they have had genuine input in creating. This requires the difficult but necessary task of bringing all stakeholders to the table. Stakeholders include students, teachers, administrators, school board members, parents, law enforcement personnel, and after-school and community-based groups. Stakeholders must struggle with questions such as the definition of "fairness," "threat," "consequence," and "change" as these concepts fit into the unique context of each school, school system, and the surrounding community.

10. All climates of safety ultimately are "local."

Many local factors contribute to creating a culture and climate of safety. These factors include the leadership— "open door" role of the school administration; "empowered buy-in" of student groups; connections to the local community and its leaders; and the respectful

integration into the safe school climates process of “safe-keepers,” such as parents and law enforcement personnel close to the school.

Implementation of the safe school climates process requires planning and dedicated work. Participants need adequate feedback and evaluative techniques to sustain and continually improve educational environments. To work effectively, safe school climates that create relationships of respect and connection between adults and students must be accepted as integral to the mission of threat assessment and management and understood from “the top down” as critical to the success of the learning experience.

The elements described above are taken from the *Threat Assessment in Schools Guide* created by the United States Secret Service and the U.S. Department of Education.

A key focus of the threat assessment process is to connect the student to services and support systems that provide encouragement and hope and reduce the likelihood that the student will engage in future threatening behavior.

Having shared the above, we are already preparing to engage our stakeholders and community in conversations around school safety, instructional goals, financial resources, human resources, facility management, defining the ideal school calendar, and other matters. We will include all of these issues and more in our strategic planning process beginning in January 2022. Through individual interviews, focus group discussions, surveys, and other data collection processes, we will start to shift our school culture and environment in new directions to support Lopez Island youth's healthy growth and development. While our current situation is troubling, let's use it as a catalyst to promote better communications, more collaboration, and heightened involvement in our school community.

Yours Truly,

Ed

Edward Murray
Superintendent
Lopez Island School District