Safe and secure schools are team effort

In the wake of the Florida school shooting tragedy, many families wondered about safety and security at Mounds View Public Schools. Through e-mail messages, personal meetings and phone calls, principals have been reassuring families and offering listening ears.

“The safety of our students and staff is our top priority,” says Irondale High School principal Amy Janecek. “After the Florida tragedy, we’ve spent considerable time reminding families of the safety and security measures that we have in place.”

Partnering with law enforcement

All schools in the District benefit from ongoing partnerships with law enforcement agencies which make their resources available to every school. In addition, District officials meet annually with law enforcement from Ramsey County, New Brighton Public Safety and Mounds View Police Department to review schools’ emergency procedures. School officials also meet regularly with representatives of the School Safety Center from the Minnesota Department of Public Safety.

These conversations—and the safety experts’ recommendations—have resulted in a set of guidelines staff members are trained to follow to keep students safe in the event of a threat in any part of a school building. All schools have comprehensive crisis plans in place which includes these procedures. In addition to these plans, every school assigns support staff members as a part of their crisis response team, which meets regularly. Every school also completes five practice lockdowns a year, and local law enforcement provides ongoing lockdown training at each school building.

Security systems

A security assessment firm has conducted a comprehensive safety audit of every school. The professionals were encouraged and pleased by the District’s security systems and procedures. Even so, the District continues to make ongoing improvements and upgrades as necessary. Some of the ongoing upgrades include buzzer security systems, picture identification systems and entrance redesigns at select sites where more secure visitor entries are necessary.

Personal connections

Knowing students personally and building relationships with them is another effective way to provide a safe school environment.

“Each school works with students to provide meaningful opportunities to feel connected every day,” says Superintendent Chris Lennox. “It’s our ongoing goal to provide safe and secure schools and also nurture a culture of respect and connectedness within our schools.”

Recent surveys show the vast majority of surveyed students feel respected by other students, and surveyed parents overwhelmingly believe the District provides a safe and welcoming environment.

“It’s encouraging to hear our students say they feel respected, connected and safe,” says Lennox. “But when it comes to school safety, we know our work is never done.”

Safety and school design

As design teams begin to create the school expansion projects approved by voters last fall, safety continues to be a primary concern. Many of the designs will incorporate greater internal visibility of educational spaces. Visibility fosters collaboration and allows increased supervision of spaces to support safety and security on a daily basis. Every design will also incorporate planning for lockdowns and evacuation as required by the District’s emergency management plans.