

(8/14/24 District Administrator's Corner Article)

One of the important, but unpleasant, parts of the beginning of a school year is a review of school safety. School safety issues continue to come to the forefront for all of us with incidents happening annually in the United States. Put simply, it is scary and we have to be prepared.

Younger children in particular may experience anxiety and fear when safety is reviewed at school. Our teachers are very careful to review using an age-appropriate way and to reduce the anxiety it may cause while balancing the information that a student may need to know. As a family, knowing how to talk with your child about school safety issues could be critical in recognizing and preventing acts of violence and will play an important role in reducing their fears.

Encourage children to talk about their concerns and to express their feelings. Please share these fears with their teachers. Some children may be hesitant to initiate such conversation, so you may want to prompt them by asking if they feel safe at school. Validate your students' feelings. Do not minimize their concerns. And, if you have any questions, please feel free to reach out to the district personnel at your student's school. If you are worried about a child's reaction or have ongoing concerns about his/her behavior or emotions, contact a school teacher or counselor and let us know how we can help.

We have adopted five district focus words related to safety that our River Valley staff will be emphasizing this year. We are trying to simplify some of our processes to be more clear and direct and safe. Here are the five district focus words:

1. **SHELTER:** This term will be used when there is a weather event (tornado, severe weather, or other natural occurrence) that requires attention. Families will be notified each time this term is practiced or used at school. Email updates will be sent from your student's school site as the situation progresses and will be shared as needed. Please remain at home until you are notified by the school.
2. **HOLD:** This term will be used in our buildings when there is a severe student behavior event in the hallway or someone has a medical emergency. Your student may share that they had to stay in their classroom due to a problem in the hallway. Again, an email will be sent to all families if the event significantly alters the school day.
3. **SECURE:** This term is important if we need to get students into the building but can continue business as usual. There are times in a school day when kids need to return to their classrooms and lock all outside doors. Communication with families would be sent to explain why and when this step was utilized in a school.
4. **LOCKDOWN:** This term is reserved for a threat inside/outside the school. This could also be called if there were an emergency or dangerous situation very near the building. Emergency responders will be involved and families will know as soon as communication can be sent. Updated communication as the situation progresses will be shared, so please remain at home until receiving further communication. The incident in a neighboring community last year would apply to this term—staff and families can apply the importance of learning from that incident.
5. **EVACUATE:** This term will be used when there is a building fire or gas leak. There is a chance that an unsafe situation could also happen near us in the community and may affect

release times. Emergency responders will be called and active in this situation; again, family members should stay at home and wait for additional information sent through school email.

Please share these terms with your students. New signage will be in each classroom. Let them know that their safety is important to us and that we will work together to keep River Valley safe and engaged in the conversation for the protection of our students, staff, and community.

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District Administrator