



Barrow County Community Members,

We are all extremely saddened by the senseless tragedy that took place recently in Parkland Florida. Our hearts and prayers go out to the individuals directly involved. Each time something like this happens it impacts us all in many ways. The act of sending our children to our schools, one of the bedrocks of our American way of life, should not be something we question or that causes us to fear for their safety.

We want to assure our community that the number one priority of your Barrow County School System and your Barrow County Sheriff's Office is student and staff safety.

We want to outline in broad strokes some of the things that we implement throughout the system to keep all our children, staff members and visitors safe. When planning for school safety we seek to create a welcoming learning atmosphere that is safe and secure without presenting our schools as foreboding, prison-like buildings.

We are blessed in Barrow to have extremely close relationships between our school system and our law enforcement and emergency services agencies. Our SROs are a vital and contributing part of each school community. Each school and facility in the system has multiple security cameras and limited entrance points. We have moved to a video and "buzz in" system for each school during the day so that all visitors are identified before being allowed into the school. There is a single point of access to the schools during the day and all other exterior doors are locked while school is in session. We continue to add to the number of cameras each year. These cameras are monitored by front office staff throughout the day. System level staff also have the ability to logon and monitor any camera at any school. All of our newer facilities have been built with entrances that ensure that all visitors have to route through the front office and we are in the process of retrofitting our older school buildings to be set up the same way.

We conduct fire, severe weather, and intruder drills on an ongoing basis. We have a system wide School Safety Committee that meets regularly and our principals have training sessions at every district leadership meeting led by GEMA, FEMA and/or local emergency and law enforcement personnel. Some topics that we have recently covered have been Active Shooter Training, Visual Weapons Screening, and Bomb Threat Management. We also provide training in safe schools for all our staff. The Collaborative Student Services team consisting of school counselors and school social workers along with district level staff members have a working goal this year to focus on mental health support for students. We have provided training for schools to establish Threat Assessment Teams at each school. We also have a district level Threat Assessment Team. We are members of the Local Emergency Planning Committee that is

made up of local emergency responders working with business and public school leaders who plan and implement practices to prevent and respond to emergencies in our community. This group facilitates local exercises and schools have been the site for some of these exercises. We have set an expectation that principals include a discussion of a safety topic at every faculty meeting and have modeled this process in our leadership meetings.

There are more checks and balances as well as comprehensive safety and emergency plans specific to each facility that are reviewed and updated continually. We do not share these plans publically simply due to the potential for that information falling into the hands of someone who may use that information to plan harm.

Everything described above have been in place prior to this school year. Each year we continue to improve and do more as resources will allow. We have gathered information from the Parkland School shooting and analyzed it to learn from it.

On a personal note, both your Superintendent and your Sheriff have their own children attending our schools every day. The safety of our schools is not only a professional passion for us but we both have a personal stake as well. Please know, just as with weather decisions, if the school or facility is open then it has been deemed to be safe by school and system administration and law enforcement/emergency services.

The most important deterrent to these kind of horrible actions is an aware and engaged community population. **See Something, Say Something** are words to live by in this day and age! Please, any time you see or hear something suspicious concerning one of our schools report the suspicious activity by contacting school staff, your principal, BCSS central office or your local law enforcement agency. Describe specifically what you observed, including:

**Who** or **What** you saw;

**When** you saw it;

**Where** it occurred;

and **Why** it's suspicious.

And of course, if there is an emergency, call 911 immediately.

We promise, we will listen.

Dr. Chris McMichael  
Superintendent  
Barrow County School System

Jud Smith  
Sheriff  
Barrow County