

Principal Swanson

Friday Show Message to HHS Students About Lockdown

Friday, October 5, 2018

Good morning, HHS. Today, I want to share a brief but important message with regard to the lockdown (or, to be more exact, the “stay in place”) protocol that we had to enact here on Monday morning. Certainly, none of us had expected the fifth week of school to start out that way, and, of course, none of us would have *wanted* the week to begin with an event that caused anxiety and stress for so many. But it happened and, for the most part, members of this school community, handled it extremely well. I want to thank you for the character of your response and also offer a few reflections on what we can learn from the experience.

As you probably know by now, I received a phone call at about 9 AM on Monday morning from a person who so far remains anonymous. The caller claimed that a specific person in our building had brought a weapon to school and was perhaps a danger to others. Although I strongly doubted the credibility of the caller, I immediately notified the Hingham Police Department and together we decided to take several active steps to ensure the safety of everybody in our building. Next, I went on the PA system and asked for what we call a “*stay in place*” protocol, which asks teachers to clear the hallways and lock their doors but allows them to continue teaching. This is what happened in most classrooms. However, some teachers understandably interpreted the message as a call for a full

“lockdown,” which asks them to stop teaching and move students to a safe zone in the classroom. This is what happened in a few locations. One lesson we learned from the experience is that we should (and we will) continue to look for ways to improve the clarity of our communication; this will include finding other ways (in addition to the PA) to communicate the specific safety protocol we intend to use.

You’ll be glad to know that several police officers arrived at our school within about two minutes of our initial call to them. They immediately joined with Officer Ford, our School Resource Officer, in enacting the necessary steps. First, we quickly located the individual who had been named as a supposed threat by the caller. That person was searched and questioned by detectives. Meanwhile, a K-9 officer, with a dog trained to recognize firearms, searched every locker in the school. That extra precaution explains why the “stay-in-place” order was extended for almost two hours. A search of that nature takes about 90 minutes. During that time, we were able to establish that the allegations were completely groundless. The person named as a threat was clearly the victim of a hoax. And obviously, in a real way, *all* of us were victims of that hoax. Detectives with the Hingham Police Department are still investigating and they hope to eventually identify the caller, who would face severe consequences if apprehended. We believe that, most likely, the caller is a person from outside our community with no meaningful connection to the school. Most importantly, we can say with certainty that the alleged threat was

*completely* unsubstantiated, and nobody here was ever in danger at any time on Monday morning.

We suffered a major disruption to our school day on Monday, and it's nothing we would have ever asked for, but the silver lining is that the incident delivered a very productive learning experience. We have already debriefed with several groups, first with teachers during an after-school meeting that day, and then with local police and district-level administrators the following day. I have also received more than a hundred emails from parents. Most of those emails complimented the strong partnership between the school and local police, and some of those emails also offered constructive feedback based on the experience. I'd like to encourage all of you to also share your feedback, or ask questions, about any topic related to school security. You should certainly feel free to contact me, or Officer Ford, or the assistant principals, or your counselors, or your teachers, at any time, if you'd like to ask questions or share your thoughts on these issues. If you'd like to speak to me in person about any security issue, please consider attending the Student-Principal Forum after school on Tuesday afternoon. Or contact me at any other time. I promise you that we'll carefully consider all feedback (including the many lessons drawn from our experience on Monday) to help improve all our safety measures.

One of my most important goals as your principal is to make sure that all of you feel totally safe in this building. But I'll need your help. On Monday morning, all of you contributed to the execution of our safety

protocols, calmly demonstrating courage in the face of the unknown. Please bring the same demeanor to the other drills that will follow in the weeks to come. What happened on Monday morning is an important reminder about how we need to prepare for unexpected events and remain vigilant about promoting safety. I hope you'll help me do that.

Ultimately, we can all breathe a sigh of relief that Monday's incident was nothing more than a hoax. Our school has been, is now, and will remain a safe space. More than that, it will remain an *excellent* place for you to learn and grow.

So, on the whole, the news this week is good. Not to mention, we're on the cusp of a long weekend, and a long-awaited No Homework Weekend. Enjoy every minute of it. Thank you, HHS, and have a great day.