



For Immediate Release from the Plum Borough Board of School Directors:

September 22, 2015

In light of the arrest of a former substitute teacher last week, the Board wanted to reach out to update the community on our perspective and the progress that has been made in our practices and programs instituted since all of this began.

There is no question that Plum has experienced a very trying year in terms of dealing with teacher misconduct and having several teachers and a former substitute teacher arrested. Yes, this has been a bad news year for our community and has become an example for school districts across Pennsylvania of how student-teacher relationships must change, and for the need to report any such incidents to Pennsylvania's ChildLine.

We appreciate the efforts of those involved in this ongoing investigation and hope this process will ultimately help us become the best example of school district oversight. It does not get lost with us the direct impact of these alleged actions on students and families. We care deeply about our students.

We recognize the need for strict oversight and updating of District practices and adherence to reporting such behavior to the appropriate authorities. As we have previously stated, this Board has been surprised and disappointed at the alleged behavior of a few bad actors among the hundreds of outstanding and dedicated professionals we entrust to our students and the community. Our Administrators have kept us apprised of the changes that have been made to ensure the highest degree of reporting and disclosure of any such activity that comes to light.

It's important for people to know that we are not standing by awaiting the outcome of trials and the grand jury process. We have been taking corrective action. We will continue to adopt and implement worthwhile changes through the Board's Safe & Supportive Schools Committee and the Community Steering Committee.

The following represent some of the many recent changes that have either taken place or are underway, including:

1. An anonymous tip line is in the process of being activated and will go 'live' in October.
2. For our employees, we have conducted refresher training on mandated reporting, and have included explicit information about mandated reporting online, with reminders posted throughout the schools, and in employee manuals.

3. In recent months, we have updated our policies and reporting procedures to be more rigorous as it relates to reporting to authorities any inappropriate behavior that threatens the safety of students. We must adhere to a zero tolerance culture of no inappropriate communication or interaction between students and teachers and staff.
4. We have increased related security measures and emergency procedures for this school year. For example, each school day, security personnel supervise and register our visitor's entrance and monitor 47 school video cameras. Our 140 campus staff members regularly circulate throughout the building to monitor students and identify potential safety concerns.
5. The District's recently constituted Safe & Supportive Schools Committee and Community Steering Committee have been meeting and will be providing progress reports at upcoming Board meetings.
6. Our new School Resource Officer conducts frequent exterior door checks, maintains high visibility, mediates conflicts, and advises staff on potential legal and criminal violations. This individual reports to the Plum Borough Police Department.
7. Social services, including school-based outpatient therapy and additional resources for parents to monitor the risk of suicide, bullying and improper Internet traffic, is being provided on an ongoing basis.
8. School mapping and emergency response systems have been enhanced to also collect real-time data.
9. We have upgraded our security camera systems and door closures.

There is more to be done. We hope that upon completion of its investigations the District Attorney's office will provide perspective and information to further assist the District. We want to do whatever it will take to remedy this situation, bring bad actors to justice and to make sure that our students are safe at school every day. We ask members of our community to continue to be patient as the judicial process reaches its conclusions so that we can move forward with a renewed sense of conduct and spirit for our students and teachers, and responsibility to the communities that we serve.

These events have naturally caused us to revisit our practices to support our goal of preventing these types of acts from ever happening again. If there is good news in any of this, we would argue that our school district may be one of the safest places for students given the level of awareness and actions taken to date.

It bears repeating that the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services' ChildLine and Abuse Registry is open 24/7. Inquiries can be made to The Intake Unit at 800-932-0313. As it currently states on their web site, "Professionals who come into contact with children are required to report when they have reasonable cause to suspect that a child under the care, supervision, guidance or training of that person or of their agency, institution or organization is an abused child. In addition, any person may report suspected abuse, even if the individual wishes to remain anonymous." Everyone in the school district and community needs to be aware of this resource for safeguarding our children. This is the law.