



OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS

Avon Public Schools

34 SIMSBURY ROAD
AVON, CONNECTICUT 06001
TEL: (860) 404-4700
gmala@avon.k12.ct.us

Gary S. Mala
SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS

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Dear Parents, Staff and Concerned Citizens:

It is with a sense of responsibility and commitment to you and our children that I communicate this message today. As you are well aware, the Avon High School community has experienced a series of unrelated events over the past two weeks that have elevated all of our concerns and have brought unnecessary negative attention to our fine school. The speed at which information flows, accurate or not, in our electronic world has resulted in various inaccuracies to be circulated both publically and privately. In an attempt to squelch circulating rumors and correct some of the inaccuracies, I am providing you with the following information for your review. This information has been prepared and is being distributed after having conferred with district legal counsel at Shipman and Goodwin and seeking the input of the Avon Police.

Please understand that my message today should not be interpreted in any way as minimizing the events of the recent past. I consider them to be significant and wish to reaffirm what I have stated on many occasions as we confronted and communicated these challenges to you. The safety and security of our children and of those who serve them is paramount and not something that is taken lightly. We have in place procedures for addressing such situations and we work collaboratively with law enforcement. Further, please be assured that we would take action if ever we thought that any of our buildings were unsafe or that any of our students were in imminent danger. We appreciate your ongoing support and belief in our efforts to provide a physically and emotionally safe environment for our students and we hope that the information below is helpful in answering some of the questions that have been raised.

1. What was the nature of the threatening statements found at AHS on Thursday, January 24, 2013?

Response: Statement #1 was found in a bathroom. It was a written threat directed at a member of the AHS staff who has been notified of the written threat. The administration and police are taking the incidents seriously and are conducting the appropriate investigatory steps to vet the issue. Also observed in other locations on the wall were a satanic reference and an inappropriate racial reference. Both of these additional writings were not in direct proximity to Statement #1. Additional details cannot be provided given that this is an ongoing police investigation.

Statement #2 was found in a different bathroom in the high school and this statement was a threat to do physical damage to the school at a specific date in the future. To date, there was no danger found in the building. Consequently, students have remained in the building. This matter was also referred to the police, who are investigating. Additional details cannot be provided in light of the ongoing police investigation.

2. Were the threatening statements found at AHS on Thursday, January 24, 2013 directed at any student?

Response: At this time there is no credible evidence that any particular student was the subject of a threatening statement. However, the police department is actively continuing their investigation and is in contact with school administration. (Mark Rinaldo, Chief, Avon Police, January 27, 2013).

3. Were the threatening statements found at AHS on Thursday, January 24, 2013 directed at any racial group?

Response: The police are treating this as a serious incident and have informed the school district that they are in the early stages of the case, but they are reviewing the writing as a possible intimidation crime based on bigotry or bias. (Mark Rinaldo, Chief, Avon Police, January 27, 2013).

4. Were the threatening statements found at AHS on Thursday, January 24, 2013 directed at any religious belief?

Response: See above

5. Were the threatening statements found at AHS defined as “hate crimes”?

Response: See above

6. Were the threatening statements found at AHS on Thursday, January 24, 2013 associated with any other incident of the recent past at AHS?

Response: No

7. At any time preceding or following the discovery of the threatening statements found at AHS on Thursday, January 24, 2013 were student and staff safety at risk?

Response: No

8. Is there writing on bathroom walls frequently observed at AHS?

Response: Yes. Upon questioning Avon High School custodians, they report having to clean bathroom walls of writing on a daily basis.

9. What assistance is the Avon Police Department providing to insure continued safety and security at AHS?

Response: The Avon Police continue to investigate both statements as noted in #1 above as criminal acts. When the identity of the person(s) responsible for either or both of the statements is determined, they will be prosecuted to the full extent of all applicable laws. They will also be subject to significant school discipline sanctions up to and including expulsion. Additionally, although there has not been found to be any imminent danger in the school to date, the Superintendent of Schools has requested that an Avon Police Officer be posted inside Avon High School beginning on Friday, January 25, 2013 until further notice. The request for police presence was not made because it was concluded that the building was unsafe or the written comments were deemed to be legitimate. It was requested to assist with allaying expressed concerns from the parent community and was meant to demonstrate awareness and responsiveness to these same concerns.

10. How are school/district officials responding to the threatening statements found at AHS on Thursday, January 24, 2013?

Response: District and school officials continue to cooperate with the Avon Police Department and have initiated their own investigation with all information being turned over to the lead investigator of the Avon Police Department. In cooperation with the Avon Police, district/school officials have engaged a series of activities to conduct a physical assessment of the school as necessary. The presence of an Avon Police Officer during school hours has been requested until further notice. The request for police presence was not made because it was concluded that the building was unsafe or the written comments were deemed to be legitimate. It was requested to assist with allaying expressed concerns from the parent community and was meant to demonstrate awareness and responsiveness to these same concerns.

11. Are any of the recent incidents reported as occurring at AHS connected in any way?

Response: No

Questions Regarding Past Incident Reported as Occurring at Avon High School

- 1. In a recently reported, unrelated incident was there a printed list of students who would be harmed ever known to exist?**

Response: No. No district, school or Avon Police Department official was ever notified that a printed list of students who would be harmed existed.

- 2. What is the school notification procedure if there ever were direct threats of harm (either verbally or in writing) directed at an individual student or student groups?**

Response: A school administrator would inform parents directly and would provide all the details of any such threats.

- 3. What is the school procedure if there ever were direct threats of harm (either verbally or in writing) directed at an individual student or student groups?**

Response: School administrators would contact the Avon Police Department immediately and would commence an investigation of which the results would be provided to the Avon Police. The Avon Police would determine if an act(s) of student misconduct constitutes a criminal violation and would proceed accordingly. At the conclusion of the school-based investigation, appropriate disciplinary consequences would be implemented with a perpetrator(s) of such act(s) up to and including expulsion. School based discipline and/or expulsion would be implemented pursuant to CT General Statute 10-233(d) and Board of Education Policy #6100.

- 4. Can district and/or school officials publicly discuss details of any act(s) of misconduct perpetrated by a student?**

Response: No. These issues are difficult because district/school officials are obligated to protect student confidentiality under the provisions of Family Educational Records Privacy Act (FERPA). Details of this Act may be reviewed at <http://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/fpco/ferpa/index.html>.

Given the specific legal parameters limiting what district/school officials may disclose with respect to student matters and after receiving specific legal advisement, the district informed the Avon High School parent and staff community of a recent incident confined to that school via an electronic message on January 17, 2013.

Thank you in advance for your understanding and patience as we continue to work within the appropriate legal parameters to resolve all matters related to these unfortunate incidents and to communicate with you.

In an attempt to move forward and resume a sense of normalcy in our high school's community, I would ask that you take time to review this information with your child(ren) to assist with any questions or concerns they may have in light of the most recent events.

In closing, I wish to reaffirm that all schools in our community provide for great environments in which excellent, teaching and learning occur. I care deeply about our students, staff, and you, as parents, who support our work in the schools.

Thank you for your continued support and enjoy a good week.

I remain very truly yours,



Gary S. Mala
Superintendent of Schools