



Friday, November 2, 2018

Dear Pittsburgh Public Schools Families,

In the aftermath of the Tree of Life Synagogue tragedy, I want to pause for a moment to reflect on its greater meaning for our Pittsburgh Public Schools community. Saturday's events impacted us personally, and in some cases directly through the loss of a family member, friend, or coworker. However broadly speaking, acts of hate affect us all, for as Elie Wiesel wrote: "Human suffering anywhere concerns men and women everywhere."

This week, our main priority was to welcome all students to a safe environment, provide a sense of normalcy and ensure supports were available to any student in need. In partnership with the Allegheny County Department of Human Services, extra mental health clinicians were on site at schools with the highest need and students at all schools were notified that supports were available.

We know that just as adults, the events of this week may affect some children more than others. While our teachers have access to resources to assist them with navigating difficult conversations that may come up in their classrooms, with a tragedy of this magnitude, we rely on the expertise of our Student Assistance Provider (SAP) Teams. This team, composed of the school's Social Worker, Counselor, and outside trained mental health providers, coordinates individual and group counseling for students in need of additional supports at every school.

Please know we are committed to having support services in place as long as they are needed. If you feel your child would benefit from speaking with a counselor, please contact their school. A child's response to a tragedy will depend greatly on a wide range of factors including their age, stage of development and personality and the impact of the crisis on their parents or others.

Some signs that your child may need extra support is if they have changes in their behavior, loose interest in activities, experience anxiety, have nightmares or physical symptoms such as headaches or stomach aches. It is common for children to cope well at first but then experience reactions days, weeks or even months later. There are school-based and local resources available to you and your family. If you need support outside of school hours, please contact RESOLVE at 1-888-796-8226. RESOLVE is a 24-hour, 365-day crisis service. They have highly trained professionals that can offer crisis counseling and support, referrals and intervention services for children of any age.

While my wish is that our children, families and staff never have to be exposed to traumatic events in their communities, places of worship, in their homes or at school, this is unfortunately a sad reality. We must be prepared as a school district. Each of our schools have safety plans, crisis

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Dr. Anthony Hamlet  
Superintendent of Schools

341 S. Bellefield Avenue  
Pittsburgh, PA 15213

[superintendenthamlet@pghboe.net](mailto:superintendenthamlet@pghboe.net)  
Phone: 412-529-3600  
Fax: 412-622-3604

Parent Hotline:  
412-529-HELP (4357)  
[www.pghschools.org](http://www.pghschools.org)



response teams and conduct regular drills that allow students and staff to practice emergency procedures and handle the threat of an intruder or active shooter. We have School Safety department and personnel dedicated to respond centrally to a school crisis and work with local police and emergency responders. If you have any questions about our safety protocols, please visit [www.pghschools.org/safety](http://www.pghschools.org/safety) or speak with your child's principal.

I'm personally proud of the members of our PPS community who led the first vigil, created visual memorials and held fundraisers. There are numerous resources available and so many ways each of us can show our support and love during this time of need. Please visit our website at [www.pghschools.org](http://www.pghschools.org) and click on the web slide titled Stronger than Hate.

As I told you on Sunday evening, we stand in solidarity with the members of our Jewish community. As Pittsburghers, we are a family. As Pittsburgh Public Schools, we are a family. We must stick together as a family and stand against any form of hate and intolerance.

The children of Pittsburgh deserve the best of our democracy and need to see that together we stand united and not divided.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "A. Hamlet".

Anthony D. Hamlet, Ed.D  
Superintendent

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Superintendent of Schools

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Pittsburgh, PA 15213

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