

September 28, 2016

Dear Hanover School District #28 Parents and Community Members,

We all share a common belief about school safety. Over the last few years the school district has been implementing actions to increase the safety of our school facilities – video surveillance inside and outside buildings, surveillance on buses and vans, keyless entry systems, audio/video entry systems, student pick-up/drop-off plans, updating of our emergency operations plan, fencing around the elementary school and updating our school behavior matrix. Your school district will continue to implement safety measures as best we can despite facing barriers due to the continued reduction in funding from the state of Colorado to our school district. Despite our continued safety efforts altercations of fighting and inappropriate verbal exchanges between adults and/or students may still occur. This was the case last week during our Homecoming dance with students and adults.

Immediately after the incident took place law enforcement was contacted. Deputies and school administration have spoken with a large number of students and adults over the past five days. The school has been careful, diligent and comprehensive in its investigation. Photos, text messages, social media postings, and emails have been voluntarily shared with law enforcement and the school district related to the incident. A challenge was that some evidence gathered contradicted statements by witnesses, and witnesses changed their statements. The only individuals who have seen the totality of the evidence are deputies investigating and school and district administration. The students and adults who have been making inaccurate statements in texts, social media and in conversation have not seen the whole picture. These inaccurate statements have been incredibly misleading and dangerous to our community and staff.

Concluding the majority of the school's investigation, a determination on the following rumors and allegations has been made:

1. After accusations of a student having a knife during the dance we reviewed multiple witness statements, digital pictures and surveillance. No knife was conclusively identified nor found in possession of a student nor discovered on school grounds. Evidence gathered and reviewed does not support an accomplice removing a suspected knife from the school.
2. After having a text message shared it was determined an adult encouraged a student to write the text and share with others claiming that a certain employee had a gun at the school and was escorted out of the building as a result. No staff member brought a gun into the school building, and no gun was found in the building.
3. There were two 30 second fights. Despite 'in the heat of the moment' comments by students it was determined there was never a credible threat of harm to the student population of the school.

4. Counter to social media postings and text messages, when law enforcement makes this determination the district cannot require any student to seek a psychological review.
5. Based on multiple witness statements and surveillance video several adults were poor role models for our students as they shouted profanity and made inappropriate gestures towards one another.

As in situations of physical fighting, students will receive disciplinary actions. Regardless of who starts a fight once physical contact happens by any person consequences are given. Due to the rights of students it is inappropriate and contrary to established district policy for me to share what disciplinary actions will be taken. Likewise, law enforcement may choose to cite students and adults involved in this incident.

Moving forward our children look up to all of us to be role models encouraging peaceful and respectful interactions with others, accepting the outcome of events whether in our favor or not, speaking of a community for all, discussions of the importance to follow rules-policies and laws, and planning on ways to further support our school and community. The school district will implement such things as training of chaperones and reminding students of expectations prior to future events. Our ultimate shared desire is to have a healthy, respected school and community, everyone speaking and acting positively for the good of all, and discouraging rumors and false allegations.

I also put out a call for your help. We need parents and community members to help in finalizing the strategic plan for our district's future, identifying new revenues for our district to fund our strategic plan actions, attending school events to build spirit and support, helping to arrange for small community chats with the Superintendent, and volunteering your talents to help our district move forward.

I, along with Mrs. Van Esselstine, am calling for a parent meeting to be held on Tuesday, October 4, 2016 at 6:30pm in the Jr/Sr High School cafeteria. The purpose is to allow for some questions regarding school safety (not individual students or adults) and to begin creating a positive solution to avoid a repeat of such an incident.

Our schools are safe. Our students are learning. Our community is and will grow stronger.

We Are Hanover!

Dr. Grant Schmidt, Superintendent
Hanover School District #28