

GREENWICH TOWNSHIP SCHOOL DISTRICT

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Dear Community Members,

The purpose of this letter is to introduce myself and share information about the strategic actions we are taking to ensure a positive, productive, and safe school environment. My name is John Tirico, and I have been appointed to serve as the Greenwich Township School District Safety Specialist. My background includes a Bachelor's Degree in Criminal Justice along with 10 years of administrative experience with oversight and review of school safety procedures. This past June, I participated in the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) School Safety Specialist Academy to receive my School Safety Specialist license.

The responsibilities of the School Safety Specialist include supervising and providing oversight for all school safety and security personnel; ensuring safety and security policies and procedures are in compliance with state laws and regulations; and providing the necessary training and resources to our school district staff in matters relating to school safety and security. The School Safety Specialist also serves as the district's liaison with local law enforcement, as well as national, state and community agencies and organizations, in matters of school safety and security.

The safety and security of our students and staff continues to be a top priority in the Greenwich Township School District. Lessons learned from school emergencies across the country highlight the importance of preparation. By taking a proactive approach and having plans in place to keep students and staff safe, we will have preventative and protective measures to stop an emergency from occurring or reduce the impact of an incident.

Maintaining safety begins with how we engage visitors who enter our schools. As we begin this new school year, we are going to begin piloting the implementation of secure vestibules at each of our schools along with new visitor access procedures. These procedures currently exist in many school districts throughout the State of New Jersey, and we believe it will add an additional layer of security at our schools.

Visitors to our schools should adhere to the following:

- No visitors are to enter the building with students during arrival. All visitors to our schools will need to have an appointment to enter the building. (If you require assistance, an appointment must be made after the start of the school day.)
- Anyone entering the building must announce themselves via the exterior intercom to gain access into the secured vestibule. The visitor will then need another security clearance to access the main school building.
- All visitors are required to show photo identification prior to being buzzed into the main building.
- If the appointment is verified, visitors will be buzzed in and must present themselves to the main office immediately upon entry.
- Visitors will be required to show photo identification again, and sign in to obtain a visitor's pass.
- It is imperative that visitors do not hold the door open for others behind them. Each visitor must be acknowledged individually through the buzzer system. Students and staff have been instructed and reminded not to open ANY door for anyone regardless if they know the individual.
- At the conclusion of the visit, visitors will be directed back to the main office to sign-out.

Dropping something off?

It is expected that some students may forget a lunch, book, backpack or other school related item necessary for the day. In each building, there will be an identifiable "Drop Off" location found within the secure vestibule. All school related items will be delivered to the student in a timely fashion. When dropping off a school related item, you will be asked to:

- Call to notify the main office that a school related item is being dropped off so that we are expecting the arrival.
- Label the school related item with the student's first and last name (Labels will also be available in the secure vestibule).
- Announce yourself upon arrival via the exterior intercom to gain access into the secured vestibule.
- Place the school related item in identified area within the secure vestibule.
- Please exit the building; further access to the main building is not permitted when dropping off school related items with the exception of medical necessities.

Front office secretaries will be required to call the police and notify school administrators if the visitor is uncooperative, does not adhere to the procedures, or becomes threatening. Ultimately, failure to follow these procedures may result in a lockdown for the safety of our students and staff, and the Greenwich Township Police Department may be notified that an intruder is in the building.

We know that these procedures are more stringent than past practice and may inconvenience our visitors. However, these are best practices as recommended by school security experts. We are saddened by the need to employ these procedures, but the safety of our students and staff must remain our priority. Unfortunately, these are the times we are living in, and we are optimistic that our visitors will ultimately recognize our need to be as vigilant as possible.

Below you will find a list of continual efforts made by the Greenwich Township School District to ensure our students are safe.

- We are a Representative District on the Gloucester County Prosecutor's Emergency Response Committee.
- All exterior doors in each of our schools are locked during school hours with only one main entrance employing a secure vestibule for an added level of security.
- All classroom instruction occurs behind locked classroom doors.
- Training on all phases of crisis management planning – mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery through the NJDOE Office of School Preparedness & Emergency Planning (OSPEP) in conjunction with the New Jersey State Police, New Jersey Domestic Security Preparedness Task Force, and the New Jersey Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness.
- School Safety Teams at each building
- Emergency Response Plans at each building; Our plans are designed locally in collaboration with the Greenwich Township Police Department and experts in the field of school security. We continually monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of our emergency plans.
- We share a close relationship with the Greenwich Township Police Department, as they are an active partner in providing a safe environment for our students.
- We provide close supervision of recess and transitions at the beginning and end of each school day. Our on duty staff is equipped with radios that communicate with the main office.
- We employ a Guidance Counselor at each school and a district-wide Social Worker who are trained to provide students and families with assistance in social-emotional matters.
- In the event of a school evacuation to an alternative off-site location, procedures are in place to safeguard your children until they can be released to you. Parents/guardians will be informed to respond to a specific location and required to show appropriate identification. Students can only be released to a person(s) listed as the emergency contact on the school information system.
- As evidenced by the 2018 Student Safety Data Collection Report, our schools promote social and emotional competencies. Our programs enable students to learn, understand and manage their emotions and relationships, and to make good decisions. Our programs employ strategies that build positive relationships between students and staff. Thus, improving communication and preparation if an unexpected emergency occurs.

School safety is a shared responsibility – staff, students, parents, and the entire community. Please report any safety issues or concerns. Thank you for your ongoing support and partnership.

Respectfully,

John Tirico
*Director of Special Services,
School Safety Specialist,
Anti-Bullying Coordinator*

