

Statement by Mark Freeman, Superintendent of Schools
January 8, 2013

As all of us are keenly aware, a gunman entered a Connecticut elementary school on December 14, taking the lives of twenty young children and six staff members. This tragedy has had a profound impact on all Americans and has prompted much discussion about public policies related to firearms and mental illness. And it has prompted school districts all across the nation to review their safety practices. Shaker is among those districts.

Nothing is more important than the safety of our students and staff. Our school district has comprehensive critical events plans covering all types of situations, ranging from chemical spills to weather emergencies. Fire, tornado, and lockdown drills are conducted regularly.

The Shaker Heights safety forces helped develop our procedures. They are familiar with our building layouts and safety issues. They are always willing to lend their expertise, and can always be counted upon to respond promptly and professionally when needed.

Although we have done and continue to do a great deal in the area of safety and security, we are open to new thinking and improvements. All changes should be carefully considered.

To that end, I have asked Ouimet Smith, our registrar, to convene a special work group on school safety, broadly defined to include everyday situations as well as extraordinary crises. This group will include members of the District's standing safety committee, other staff members, and the Shaker Heights police and fire chiefs. The group's charge includes examination of the following:

- Our current practices
- Current expert thinking on best practices
- Areas requiring further study
- Outside experts who may be able to advise us

I am asking the work group to develop recommendations that are realistic and effective, and to consider the possibility of unintended consequences. Suggestions are welcome, and every idea will be considered. It is my hope that the work group will produce recommendations by the end of February.

In the near term, we are strictly enforcing the safety procedures already in place and making some building modifications where appropriate. If this results in some inconvenience, so be it.

Children should be safe in the community, in their homes, and in their schools. With the cooperation of students, staff, and the community, we are committed to making our schools as safe as possible.