

February 25, 2009

Dear Meridian CUSD #223 Community:

The issue we dealt with on Friday at Highland is certainly one we don't expect to happen, but the fact is that it did. I want to express appreciation to all of those who assisted in the incident. One of the District's bus drivers was the first to provide information, which led to the investigation and ultimately the recovery of a .22 caliber hand pistol. From there, Mike Coulahan and one of the building's counselors worked through the process of investigating the incident and contacting/working with the parents of the student to identify where the student got the pistol and how it ended up in his book bag. The Ogle County Sheriff's Department was extremely thorough and helpful in the investigation and working with Mr. Coulahan and me throughout the day. The Highland office staff was extremely calm throughout all of the activity and helped keep everything level headed. We also received good support from the parents of the student, who were visibly shaken by the incident. I also appreciate the calm of our community and parents following our communication. I hope that it reflects the mutually high trust and respect level we seek as a School District and community.

I've fielded some questions regarding the flow and timeliness of information. Once a determination was made that no one was threatened or in danger, we wanted to conduct and conclude the investigation completely before communicating the findings to our parents, community and staff. The first communication I made was the mass phone broadcast. Secondly, I posted a summary on the webpage because I referenced it in the phone message. Next, I sent an e-mail out to all District staff. The investigation concluded around 2:15 p.m. and I believe our communications started going out just after 2:30 p.m. Given this situation, I believe it is a credit to everyone involved that the instructional day was not negatively impacted. Obviously, if anyone would have been in danger we would have responded differently in communicating within the building, District and community.

I've also been asked about what can be done in the future. We've already discussed the possibility of some gun safety education programs and/or working with families to make sure firearms are secure and not accessible to children. We all certainly feel more vulnerable after an incident like this, but hopefully it is also an opportunity for all of us to be more diligent about protecting children. This is obviously a collaborative effort between the School District, parents and the community.

Finally, the incident regarding the student is being handled in accordance with Meridian CUSD #223 School Board Policy. There isn't anyone in the organization who doesn't take the incident seriously. Because of student confidentiality requirements, the District cannot reveal the specific disciplinary action assigned to students.

If you have any questions, feel free to contact me at (815) 645-2606.

Sincerely,



Bob Prusator  
Superintendent, Meridian CUSD #223