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TO: RSU 9 Parents & Guardians
FROM: Christian M. Elkington, Superintendent
RE: School Safety Update!
DATE: 5-25-2022

There are no adequate words to express how those of us who either send our children to school or who have made working in schools our life's work feel about what we witnessed in Texas yesterday. The shooting at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas follows 77 previous incidents of gunfire on school grounds nationwide so far this year. These numbers are so shocking that I can't believe what I just wrote. This adds up to 78 too many. The fact that our nation's leaders are unwilling or unable to find common ground that would help make our schools, children, and staff safer is incredibly discouraging. Instead, we are left with having to protect ourselves the best we can and hope we won't face similar circumstances here.

We in RSU 9 are working very hard to do everything we can to ensure the safety of our schools. You should have received a note from your school's principal explaining the efforts that we are making on an ongoing basis in RSU 9 to keep our students and staff safe. Each of our schools have safety plans which are practiced throughout each school year. We also have a District Safety Team, which has met for several years and continues to meet (last on May 11th, 2022), to review district and community-wide issues with our local law enforcement agencies. These meetings include school administration, county emergency management personnel and local law enforcement. As a result of this team-approach and coordination of efforts many of our schools have hosted active shooter drills and simulations to familiarize area law enforcement officers with our school layouts, which will expedite their response times and effectiveness should the unthinkable happens. I am very pleased to say that of all the districts I have worked in over the years, the coordination and cooperation between RSU 9 and law enforcement is the best working relationship I have ever been a part of.

Because of this tragedy in Texas, questions have naturally come up regarding our own active shooter response training. RSU 9 approaches this from multiple levels. From a prevention standpoint, we have a system in place at each of our schools which includes lockdown and lockout protocols that are practiced several times throughout the year by the school's staff. Along with these drills and protocols, RSU 9 Staff have been trained in "Avoid, Deny, Defend" (<https://www.avoiddenydefend.org/>) which trains staff members on how to respond to an active shooter incident. Because of a significant influx of new staff, we will be doing follow-up training this coming August and will continue to repeat the training as circumstances dictate. Please know that this training includes *preventative strategies to help stop incidents from occurring* and has been provided through our local law enforcement agencies. A "true" TEAM effort!

In terms of assessing possible behavioral threats, multiple staff have been trained to use the Maine School Safety Center's Comprehensive School Threat Assessment Guidelines, known as CSTAG. Each of our schools has a trained team, which includes administration, guidance, the RSU 9 school resource officer and social workers, who will use this system to determine threat levels of students involved in school-related incidents. This team approach ensures that multiple people have input on a possible threat level so that the best decision can be made in support of both individual students and our

"Preach, my dear sir, a crusade against ignorance." Thomas Jefferson

entire student body and staff. This system has been used multiple times over the last few years throughout RSU 9 and we feel it has supported us well, successfully ensuring up-to-date student, staff, and visitor safety within our schools.

From experience, we know that acts of violence such as this latest one in Texas will impact the physical and mental well-being of some of our children, staff, and families. Please know that you are not alone, and that support is available from RSU 9 school staff as well as from health and medical resources within our communities. We know that our children and young adults will process what happened in Texas in different ways and so we strongly encourage any of our students who feel the need to stop by and see their school's counselor, nurse, or social worker to do so at any time. We also encourage you to connect with your children, family, and friends to support each other and seek help if needed. Since students will likely want to share their emotions and to receive support from you, their parents, two documents are attached to this message to help you with those conversations. The National Association of School Psychologists also has some [useful resources on how to talk to children about violence](#) in age-appropriate ways.

I am privileged to have worked with Janet Robinson, who was the superintendent of schools for Sandy Hook Elementary School during their tragedy on December 14th, 2012. What I learned from Janet is that you need to know your kids as well as you possibly can, you need to prepare your kids to face a possibly terrifying emergency, and that school staff and the community must be prepared for the possibility of dealing with a horrific event. Two-way communication between schools and our families is critical. I want to assure you that the staff of RSU 9 is committed to the social and emotional well-being and safety of our students, staff, and schools. School should and must be a place where students feel safe and where you, as parents, feel that your kids are safe. Please remember that we have great kids in RSU 9 and an excellent staff who is here to serve our students and to help you, our parents!

Like you, I am deeply shocked by the news of the shooting at Robb Elementary School. And like you, I share in the heartbreak of those families and their friends who have lost a loved one and for the staff at Robb Elementary School, who I am sure loved these children as their own. Please join me in keeping the students, families, and staff of the Uvalde Consolidated Independent School District in our thoughts, prayers, and hearts at this time. Thank you!