

March 16, 2018

Dear Community Members,

I am saddened to report that today two of our high schools were subject to threats of violence. This morning, a student found graffiti in a bathroom at Alameda High School threatening violence against Muslim students this coming Tuesday, March 20. Later this morning, graffiti threatening violence against students was also found in a bathroom at Island High School.

In both cases, school and district staff worked closely with Alameda Police Department to assess the risk and determine next steps. Because every situation is different, what happened at each site was also different.

At Alameda High School, Principal Robert Ithurburn sent an email to his parents describing the threat and reached out to the school's Muslim Student Union to give them a chance to talk about the threat. He has also circulated a photo of the graffiti to teachers to see if they recognize the handwriting. The school's administration and the Alameda Police Department are continuing to investigate that situation, which has been deemed a hate crime. As superintendent, I want to be very clear that we denounce such hate speech on our campuses and will not tolerate it.

At Island High School, the graffiti threatened violence at noon. Because the threat seemed imminent and there was not enough time to fully investigate, AUSD placed the students at Island and Woodstock Child Development Center (WCDC) in a shelter in place. Out of an abundance of caution – and in consultation with police - AUSD then released the students early. WCDC students remained in shelter in place for a short while longer, and then they returned to their normal routine. Those students were not released early because the threat was no longer deemed credible. APD and Island High staff are continuing their investigation of that incident. That, too, will include handwriting analysis.

Of course, coming on the heels of Wednesday's National Walkout Day, today's threats are disheartening. On Wednesday, thousands of our students participated in student-led vigils on their campuses to honor the 17 victims in the Parkland shooting. About 1000 students then marched to Washington Park for a rally that was organized by and attracted students from all four of our high schools, two charter schools, and several middle schools. The rally included voter

registration, opportunities to write and call legislators, information on gun control, and student speeches. It was a powerful, inspiring, and humbling event.

Today, a few individuals posted disturbing and violent graffiti, frightened their peers, disrupted classes, and distracted staff from being able to support schools and students in other meaningful and valuable ways. That is not powerful. It is not inspiring. Nor is it unusual at this point. Since the Parkland shooting, schools across the Bay Area and indeed the entire country have had to close due to threats.

It is sad that this is our new normal. And yet we can't ever take it as normal. As district and school administrators, we have to take every threat seriously and respond to it. I wish I could promise to make the threats stop, but I cannot. What I can do is promise that we will continue to work on violence prevention by implementing anti-bias and anti-bullying programs and assessing the mental health and behavioral needs of our students. And we will continue to strengthen our incident response by training staff and students on emergency procedures, modernizing the safety features on our campuses, and working closely with APD on assessing those threats that do occur.

Without question, something in our society is changing and providing fertile ground for these threats. What gives me hope in these times is the strength, passion, resilience, and optimism of the young people on our campuses. What gives me confidence is the expertise, capacity, and determination of our staff and our APD partners to respond to threats skillfully when they occur. And what gives me sustenance is knowing that much of our island community supports our "Everyone Belongs Here" vision and the urgency of protecting the young people here.

Please join us in our vigilance and in our work to report threats when they occur, and please know we continue to work with APD and our school administrators to keep our campuses safe and responsive when threats occur.

Sincerely,

Sean McPhetridge, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools