



## Montgomery County Public Schools

Dear Families,

Since 2020, firearms have been the **leading cause of death** for children and teens in the U.S., according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Firearm-related deaths have risen among children and teens since the pandemic began, increasing by 46% from 2019 to 2022. Also, suicides by firearm have increased over the past decade. In 2022, 43% of all suicide deaths among children and teens involved firearms.\* Most of these deaths, as well as many firearm-related injuries, **can be prevented** through secure firearm storage.

Recently, the Montgomery County School Board passed a [resolution](#) directing me to work to increase awareness among our students, families, and staff about the importance of secure gun storage. Providing our students and staff in Montgomery County Public Schools with a safe educational environment remains our top priority—students cannot learn if they do not feel safe.

Virginia law **prohibits anyone from recklessly leaving a loaded, unsecured firearm in such a manner as to endanger the life or limb of any child under the age of 14.**

Secure storage means keeping guns **unloaded, locked, and stored separately** from ammunition. Parents often think that kids don't know where firearms are kept, or trust that kids won't touch the firearms unsupervised, *but research shows both of these assumptions are usually wrong.*

Use trigger locks or cable locks to prevent a firearm from firing. Some locking devices offer a keypad while others can be opened with the owner's fingerprint (known as biometric). There are affordable, with biometric cases starting as low as \$80. There is also a potential \$300 reimbursement ([Virginia Firearm Safety Device Tax Credit](#)) for the purchase of a gun safe.

In addition to these practices, it is important to engage children and adolescents in conversations about the dangers associated with using firearms and what to do and not do in the event they access a firearm. Also **ask** about unsecured guns **in other homes** your children visit.\*\*

All students and members of our school community deserve to feel safe. It is on all of us to work together to prevent firearm violence and to avoid the harm and tragedy that shootings of any kind can cause in the spaces in which we live, learn, work, and play.

Thank you for being a partner in these efforts.

Sincerely,

Bernard F. Bragen Jr., Superintendent

\*Data sources: [The Impact of Gun Violence on Children and Adolescents](#) (KFF, Feb 2024) and [Child and Teen Firearm Mortality in the U.S. and Peer Countries](#) (KFF, Jul 2023)

\*\*[Be SMART Resources](#)