Education Today

Schools Mark a Moment of Silence on September 11 Anniversary

By William H. Kerr, Ed.D.

Schools across Pennsylvania will mark a moment of silence on September 11 to remember the September 11, 2001, tragic attack by terrorists on New York City, Washington, D.C., and Pennsylvania.

The September 11 attacks were the deadliest in history, resulting in 2,977 deaths: 2,753 at the World Trade Center, 184 at the Pentagon, and 40 on Flight 93. Thousands more suffered injuries and ongoing health issues.

We should remember the profound loss of life and the courage demonstrated by countless individuals on September 11, 2001. The tragic events not only claimed thousands of innocent lives but also united the nation in mourning and resilience.

It is important to honor the memory of those who perished, including civilians, military personnel, government employees, and emergency responders, as well as those who have continued to suffer from the lasting effects of that day.

September 11 serves as a reminder of the strength and compassion shown in times of any national or international tragedy – communities coming together to support one another and reaffirm shared values of freedom and hope.

September 11 also calls for reflection on the importance of vigilance, understanding the historical context of terrorism, and the ongoing efforts to promote peace and security in an ever-changing world.

From the artifacts of the George W. Bush Presidential Library and Museum, I vividly recall this day – the documented image and words which still resonate with me:

> *President George W. Bush visited Ground Zero in New York City on September 14, 2001. Standing upon the debris of the World Trade Center, the President pledged that the voices calling for justice from across the country would be heard.*
>
> *As firefighter Bob Beckwith stood next to him listening, the President used his bullhorn to tell a group of first responders working in the debris, "I can hear you. The rest of the world hears you. And the people who knocked these buildings down will hear all of us soon." Responding to the President's words, rescue workers cheered and chanted "U.S.A.! U.S.A.!"*

America will always remember September 11, 2001, and Pennsylvania ensures this day is commemorated.

The Pennsylvania General Assembly passed legislation in June 2024, which was signed by Governor Josh Shapiro, and amended the Public-School Code, as follows:

"Each school entity shall conduct a moment of silence during instructional hours for students and faculty to observe the anniversary of September 11, 2001, as a remembrance of the thousands of military service persons, government employees, civilians and emergency responders who lost their lives or were wounded by terrorist attacks on that date."

The law defines school entity as a school district, charter school, regional charter school, cyber charter school, intermediate unit or area career and technical school.

Included in the law, the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) is to identify a model curriculum for instruction in the events and significance of September 11, 2001.

The model curriculum identified by the PDE requires the following topics:

- Historical context of terrorism.
- The terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center, the Pentagon and United Airlines Flight 93, which crashed in Shanksville, Pennsylvania
- American recovery and response to the attacks; and,
- Global challenges and consequences in a post-September-11 world.

Further, the law states, "the PDE shall make available on the department's publicly accessible Internet website curriculum materials and other available resources regarding the events and significance of September 11, 2001, for voluntary use by school entities."

In conclusion, remembering the tragic events of September 11, 2001, holds great significance because it honors the lives lost and acknowledges the profound impact the attacks had on our nation and the world.

By reflecting on this day, schools can promote understanding of the historical context, encouraging resilience and unity in the face of adversity and remembering the value of human life.

We shall never forget September 11, 2001, when America was united as "one nation, under God, indivisible for liberty and justice for all."

William H. Kerr, Ed.D. is the Court-Appointed Receiver for the Duquesne City School District by the Common Pleas Court of Allegheny County, as recommended by the Pennsylvania Secretary of Education, for the oversight of academic, financial, and school district operations.