

Phillip Thompson, Ed.D.  
Division Superintendent



Haywood Hand, M.Ed.  
Assistant Superintendent

August 1, 2018

Dear Parents and Guardians,

In light of the school tragedies that have occurred across our nation in recent months, several concerned parents and community members have reached out to the school system regarding safety protocols in our schools. We all mourn the loss of life in these senseless acts of violence, and we are left wondering what we can do to avoid tragedies such as these within our community.

I would like for you to know that the safety of students and staff has always been and continues to be a top priority for the Rockbridge County School Board. Over the past decade or so, Rockbridge County Public Schools (RCPS) has attempted to walk a fine line between improving safety measures within our schools, and retaining the welcoming and inviting environment our schools have been known for over the years. We recognize that we have no choice except to work harder to increase safety within our schools, and RCPS has taken many measures to reduce the probability of an incident that could harm students or staff.

RCPS purposely exceeds the number of required safety trainings in schools every year. It is only through practicing various degrees of lockdowns, fire drills, tornado drills, and other scenarios that students and staff can be prepared for an emergency. Additionally, RCPS is in the initial phases of becoming certified through the ALICE Training Institute (Alert Lockdown Inform Counter Evacuate). Consistent training for our students and staff will help us be better prepared in the event of an emergency situation. RCPS has established safety committees and threat assessment teams at the school and division level that evaluate security concerns and propose solutions regularly. We are proud to have an extremely collaborative relationship with local and state law enforcement officials. Working with law enforcement officers, we conduct regular safety audits of all of our school campuses. We also have a comprehensive network of internal and external campus security cameras at all schools. We are fortunate to have school resource officers (SRO) who are assigned to Rockbridge County High School and Maury River Middle School. These SROs help at all of our schools, and we are currently working with the local Sheriff's Department and the Rockbridge County Board of Supervisors to increase SRO presence in our elementary schools.

One of the most visible new layers of security that will be noticed in our schools this year is the addition of a new access control "Buzz-In" system at each of our main offices. During regular school hours all school exterior doors will be locked and access to the building will only be permitted through the main entrance/office. This new system will require all visitors to "buzz in" to gain access to schools through a closed circuit monitoring system.

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We need your help and cooperation for our system to work effectively. Our office staff is handling multiple tasks and although they will work diligently to help you gain access into the building as quickly as possible, there may be the occasional brief delay until a staff member can view you on the monitor and allow access. Please help by identifying yourself, providing your child's name or the reason for your visit, and showing a valid form of identification. Once visitors have been buzzed into the office, you will receive a visitor's badge, if necessary.

Procedures to enter the buildings at all RCPS school locations will be as follows:

1. Please bring your identification with you when visiting our schools.
2. Near the school main door locate the newly installed intercom/camera.
3. Press the button on the intercom.
4. Place yourself in front of the camera on the panel.
5. A school staff member will see you and will respond verbally.
6. They can then release the door for you to enter the building.
7. You will then report to the office.

This new security measure will be a change for our staff members as well as our parents and community members. We ask for your patience as we all become acquainted with this new system to keep our students and staff safe.

Due to the nature of some security measures, we have chosen to not reveal all of them to the public so as to decrease the likelihood that those who would consider doing harm might be able to circumvent those security measures. Further, it is important to recognize that everyone plays a critical role in school safety. Students, staff, parents, and community members are encouraged to be observant and let a school employee or law enforcement officer know if they see or hear something that makes them feel uncomfortable, frightened, and especially if they hear threats of dangerous behavior toward a school.

As always, I greatly appreciate your continued support and trust for allowing us to care for and educate your children. Their safety will always be our top priority.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Phillip Thompson'.

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Division Superintendent