December 17, 2012

Dear Poe Community: A Time for Reflection

“Safety First” has always been the number one priority of the Houston Independent School District and for us at Poe Elementary. We have the most wonderful children here at Poe. They, and their parents, deserve to know that they are safe during the day while at school. I remember when I first came to Poe; I found a lovely community, very laid back, very trusting, and a place where “nothing bad ever happens.” Or, so I was told. The truth is, something very bad did happen at Poe a long time ago and something bad could always be lurking. Just do a Google search of our school if you don’t know what I’m talking about. I spent my weekend thinking of our Poe families and our Poe children; reflecting on our safety practices and wanting to do everything as a community to make the odds as slim as humanly possible that something bad could happen. We will continue to do everything we can think of to keep your kids safe.

With that said, here is what we currently have in place to keep your children as safe as possible:

- All doors to the building are kept locked except for the front main doors.
- The only time other doors are unlocked is during the morning passing period from 7:45 – 8:00 am. (This is something I would like to change immediately. Forgive the inconvenience, but I need everyone to start using the front doors only to enter AND exit the building.)
- All visitors, including those of you we know very well, have to sign in at the front office and receive a visitor pass. Anyone who does not do this is stopped by staff members and sent back to the office to sign in.
- Our teachers and staff members monitor your children. My policy is that children are never out of our eyesight.
- At the end of the day, children are monitored as they move to their prospective after school spots.
- Parents are asked to wait in the front of the school instead of entering the building at dismissal. We bring all car riders and walkers out to the front of the school.
- We ask all cars picking up children to travel from North to South across the front of the school so that we can load children against the curb. We will not load children in cars heading the other direction.
- We ask all of our parents to observe the law and not be on cell phones AT ALL while in the school zone. This includes texting.
- I have asked, and am asking again, that parents not allow their children to play on the hills in front of the school until 3:30 pm. This gives us time to get the majority of our children to their cars without the confusion of other children running around and playing. It is very difficult to know who is and who isn’t monitored when if this is happening.
- Staff monitors students who ride buses as they wait for their buses in the back.
• We have a fire drill each month and students and staff receive feedback to improve upon these each time.
• We have one lock-down drill each year and one shelter-in-place drill also.

Of course, these are the main policies. Along with each of these comes the everyday watchfulness and common sense of the staff and adults at Poe. As I assemble these, I see things already I feel could be tightened.

Here are the steps I plan for us to take to do this:
This week, I will talk with our staff about our procedures and we will review each of these. Then, on Thursday evening, January 10, I invite you to come to an open forum where we can discuss safety at our school as a community. I will start the meeting at 6:30 p.m. to allow you time to get there. The only way we can keep our children truly safe is to work together. We have all heard that “it takes a village.” In this case, it is certainly true. Our procedures are only good when everyone follows them. The minute one door is propped open all safety measures disappear. The best way I know to get everyone to buy in, is to involve as many people as possible. It may inconvenience us to be as safe as possible. We have had an awful reminder that bad things can happen in the most perfect of places. We must keep our children safe even if it inconveniences us a little.

Be thinking about things you’ve seen or ideas you may have. We will not be able to satisfy everyone, but I want to hear everyone and see what trends there may be. Feel free to email me. Put “SAFETY” as your subject so I can sort my emails when the time comes to pull these all together.

Now is not the time for alarm. It is simply a time to reflect and make sure we do the right things every day. As we head into the holidays, give your kids a few extra hugs and say a few extra “I love you”s. Children are amazingly resilient. They look to us to know that everything is okay.

Have a fantastic holiday and rest assured that your children are safe at Poe and that we care enough to go back over each of our policies so that we can say that with absolute confidence. As always, it is an honor to lead the fine community of Edgar Allan Poe Elementary School.

Sincerely,

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