

Subject: Confidential: Re: Serious Situation at WMS

From: Deanne Galdston <deanne.galdston@watertown.k12.ma.us>

Date: 1/27/2024, 9:19 AM

To: Mark Sideris <msideris@watertown-ma.gov>, Jessica Middlebrook <jessica.middlebrook@watertown.k12.ma.us>, Amy Donohue <amy.donohue@watertown.k12.ma.us>, Kendra Foley <kendra.foley@watertown.k12.ma.us>, Rachel Kay <rachel.kay@watertown.k12.ma.us>, Lisa Capoccia <lisa.capoccia@watertown.k12.ma.us>, Lily RaymanRead <lily.raymanread@watertown.k12.ma.us>

Good morning,

I would like to apprise you of what has transpired since I sent you the email regarding the WMS situation.

Soon after the email I sent out to you, Principal [REDACTED] and the two assistant principals reached out to the parents of the students on the list. There was sufficient information to indicate that students had been sharing who may have been on the list, and therefore, we took the proactive approach to inform families of students on the list. Once that was complete, [REDACTED] sent out the email that you can find below to families, followed by what I sent as well.

I highlighted in my first email to you about the steps that were taken to determine the credibility of a threat, which include screening the student by a trained mental health clinician, meeting with the family, obtaining the list, examining the list, speaking with the student about the list, searching for any type of weapon or anything that would include a plan, working with WPD to determine access to weapons outside of school, WPD meeting with the student and the family and more. None of these provided anything that would lead to a heightened level of concern, thus ruling out the credibility of the threat. We do believe based on all that we have investigated, that this student was expressing their frustration on paper with people.

The mental health team and the administration met early in the day to determine the best steps to help students process the event during the day. This included creating space in advisory to talk about any concerns and to make sure students who needed it could access mental health staff. In some advisories, restorative circles were held. This is not a school-wide expectation, as not everyone has been trained, but those who wanted to facilitate a circle did so. There were students throughout the day who did access support. Additionally, staff helped students who may have been conjecturing about the event by redirecting conversations or by asking if they needed clarification. Absences were slightly higher on Friday, going from 7% to 8%.

On Monday, during Mindful Monday Advisory, there will be the opportunity for students and teachers to be in circle to have a facilitated conversation. If an advisor is not ready to do so, we will still provide space for students to process or talk about their feelings about what happened. This time will be used to assess where students are at and will inform any further interventions that may be needed.

While I can't share any information about consequences, (as I know that is something people want to know), please be aware that the student will not reenter until we are confident that we can keep them safe upon reentry, and determine how best to repair the harm that has been done. These students will be together for five more years, and we have to make sure that we can restore the community.

If people ask you about this, here are some talking points:

- The school department worked collaboratively with the Watertown Police Department to rule out risk and affirm student safety.
- We are concerned for the well-being of any student who makes a threat and will provide the necessary support for the student to prevent this from happening again
- Our goal is to restore the harm that was done and ensure that all students feel safe in our schools
- Students at WMS have access at any time to our team of mental health providers if they need additional support
- We encourage caregivers to help their children use appropriate perspective-taking (ie reminding them safety concerns were ruled out; there is no safety risk) and prevent escalation by moving onto other topics next week.

I want to thank you all for your support, and appreciate the various perspectives and experiences you have, and the assistance that you provided. If you have any questions over the weekend, please reach out at any time. I will be answering [REDACTED] email shortly.

Dede

Dear Watertown Middle School Families,

As always, I want to keep you informed when situations occur at WMS.

It came to our attention that a student made a list of people they were frustrated or annoyed with. While the intention of the student was not to cause harm, we responded by implementing our safety protocols thoroughly. We assessed whether there was a credible threat, including sharing this information with the Superintendent and the Watertown Police Department through our School Resource Officer. We have been working with the student and their family, who have been cooperative, to ensure their well-being and the safety of our community.

Earlier this afternoon, WMS administrators made phone calls to every caregiver of a student whose name was on the list to inform them. If you did not receive a phone call, there was no connection between your child and this list. At this time, we are informing you out of an abundance of care for our community.

Our counseling team is available to provide support and guidance to any student who may

feel anxious or overwhelmed. Please be assured that we are dedicated to maintaining a secure and nurturing learning environment. If you have any questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to reach out to me.

Caregivers, please speak with your children about the importance of reporting anything suspicious or concerning to an adult. Proactive communication is one really important tool we use as a school community to ensure everyone's safety.

Thank you for your ongoing support and understanding.


Sincerely,


Principal
Watertown Middle School

On Thu, Jan 25, 2024 at 2:34 PM Deanne Galdston
<deanne.galdston@watertown.k12.ma.us> wrote:

Good afternoon,

It has come to the attention of the middle school administration that a student created a "hit list" with 40+ names. The existence of the list was brought to the school administration by a teacher who overheard students talking about who was on the list. The teacher asked one of the students about it who indicated that it wasn't "serious" just a list of people the writer of the list was upset with or frustrated by.

Their parents were contacted, and they provided the school with the list that was created on their Chromebook, labeled "hit list". At this time, following all of our protocols, including screening the student, speaking with the SRO, checking for access to weapons, and speaking with the family of the student, we have no reason to believe that there was a threat to students or that it was credible. The WMS administration is going to begin calling the families of the students on the list right after dismissal, as there is a lot of talking around the school about the existence of the list.  will send out a letter to middle school families about this as well, stressing that there is no credible threat.

When speaking to the student, they identified that they wrote the list out of frustration, not to do harm in any way. That being said, once the list was written as a hit list, we needed to take action to ensure the safety for both this student and the school community.

Thank you,

Dede

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Dede Galdston, Ed.D.

Superintendent of Schools

WPS creates an equitable, challenging, and innovative learning environment where everyone belongs and every student is empowered to shape the world around them.



Excellence * Equity * Community

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