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## CHESTERFIELD COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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Marcus J. Newsome, Ed.D., Superintendent

September 2014

Dear parents and guardians,

Providing a safe, supportive and nurturing learning environment for our students and staff remains one of the top priorities of Chesterfield County Public Schools. Parents entrust their children to us every day and expect we will keep them safe. Our county's recognition as one of the 100 Best Communities for Young People is due in part to our ongoing work with parents and the community to meet that expectation.

Our schools are safe, and we intend to take every reasonable precaution to keep them that way. During the past year, we've taken a number of steps to further improve safety:

- Implementing a rigorous schedule of safety drills for events such as fires, earthquakes, health emergencies and uninvited visitors (A total of 1,612 safety drills were conducted last year.)
- Convening a Joint Safety Committee that includes school division leaders, emergency first responders, mental health officials and parents
- Creating a partnership with Virginia Tech that yielded a review of our student support services
- Developing threat assessment teams at every school and providing training on how to conduct a threat assessment
- Conducting a review of school security camera systems
- Making an anti-bullying campaign called Promote Respect part of our Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports program

It is our intention to provide students with a safe haven for the 6.5 hours each day they are with us. We know that students can't achieve unless they feel comfortable.

This work starts with our teachers and staff members, who have been asked to create positive, meaningful relationships with students. We want children to have at least one adult in their school to whom they can go for support. The response to our recent Thank a Teacher campaign yielded wonderful stories about these strong relationships and the difference they are making.

The work continues with our administrators, who have created teams of staff members trained to look for signs of distress and who have established month-by-month schedules of safety and health drills designed to prepare all staff and students for a crisis should one occur. And the work reaches the central office level when leaders collaborate with researchers for a review of student support best practices and with local first responders to plan responses to critical incidents.

### OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

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These efforts complement ongoing, year-round work to support students and staff. Each Chesterfield County school has a critical incident plan, which includes prevention and response efforts. This document is reviewed and revised annually — by school-based leaders, central office leaders and the School Board. Each school has its own critical incident team and customized response and prevention procedures. These teams participate in planning meetings, trainings and drills throughout the year.

Our school division continues to implement other specific measures:

- Prevention efforts at every school include requiring all staff members to wear ID badges, requiring all guests to wear visitor badges and monitoring access to entrance points. All schools have a technology-based visitor management system that monitors who is in school facilities.
- Secondary schools are equipped with interior and exterior video cameras that allow us to monitor activity throughout school grounds. Every elementary school has a camera at the front door that allows front office staff to see visitors before buzzing them in through a locked front door.
- Chesterfield County school resource officers are assigned to middle and high schools, and multiple schools have school security officers who provide an additional safety presence.
- The school division's security office takes the lead in performing safety and security checks to help implement policies and best practices.
- Nearly 20 schools have adopted the Watch D.O.G.S. program that brings adult males into our schools to serve as positive role models.

Last spring, school safety audits featured school staff members working with emergency first responders to review building security — inside and outside of buildings. This fall, we will share with parents a website devoted to school division safety efforts.

Our school division is as equipped as ever to keep your child safe. We continue to work with schools and emergency first responders to take reasonable steps to provide a safe, supportive and nurturing learning environment for students and staff members. Schools are among the safest places for children and young people.

I ask that you join our efforts to sustain learning environments that are free from distraction and disruption. By doing so, we can continue to meet and exceed the expectations our community has for our schools. Thank you for your support of Chesterfield County Public Schools!

Sincerely,

Marcus J. Newsome, Ed.D.  
Superintendent