

*The following is the text of a statement made by Superintendent Debra Bowers at the October 9 meeting of the St. Louis Park Public Schools Board of Education:*

Students, families and community members, I appreciate this opportunity to discuss with you the events that took place leading up to and after the decision to cancel classes at the high school last Monday, October 2.

There are three points I'd like to share: 1) what went right, 2) why we took the course of action we did, and 3) steps for prevention and improved security.

First what went right: The week prior to Monday's school closing, there was an incident in which a student brought an unloaded weapon into our school. This student was disciplined following our student discipline policy. However, it was quite disturbing to discover that a few students knew about the weapon and chose to remain silent.

Following this incident it was communicated to the student body that they play a key role in keeping their school safe. Students are our eyes and ears. It is crucial that students are comfortable in freely sharing critical information with an adult when a potentially dangerous situation exists.

The good news is that last Sunday in St. Louis Park the students talked. Adults listened. Action was taken. Conveying the point that if you tell us, we will listen. We will act. We care about the safety of students and staff.

Secondly, let me explain the course of action taken on October 1. Last Sunday evening St. Louis Park students heard a rumor of intended violence and shared their concerns with a St. Louis Park employee. This report was investigated and by 10:30 PM was found to be without merit. About an hour later, the St. Louis Park Police Dispatch received a call from a student reporting a separate incident of potential violence. At this late hour, with no time to investigate this second report the decision was made to close the high school without sharing the reason why.

This created a safe environment for students to provide accurate information to police and staff. This allowed for an efficient & effective investigation.

By early Monday morning police and staff completed the investigation of this second reported concern. They determined that our students were not in danger. Immediately, we called our high school students' families, sent a letter to all families, updated our website, and notified the general public with details of the event.

My apologies to those who think our actions were inappropriate under these circumstances, but not for the decision made late on Sunday night. It was a relief

to find that the rumors were not real. The decision was motivated by good faith concerns for safety and the ongoing investigation.

On Sunday night when we were making our decision and considering various scenarios, only one question needed to be answered to our satisfaction. That question was: Are we willing to put our students at risk? The answer was no. Student safety is our top priority.

In conclusion, I'd like to share next steps for prevention and improved security.

We are learning from this experience and related national events. We have hired additional security staff at the high school and student movement has been restricted.

A meeting has been set up this week to bring a team of school administrators and members of local law enforcement together to address safety and security within our schools.

We with all schools in Minnesota will soon begin lock-down drills in addition to our fire drills.

Also each school will provide opportunities for parents to engage in conversations about student safety. We welcome your thoughts. Check with your child's school for exact dates and times or watch for updates in the Sun Sailor or on our website.

Thank you for your feedback and support, our students for speaking up, our staff for paying attention and our police for answering our call.

We want you to know that we are committed to maintaining a safe learning environment for our students and staff. We look forward to working with all of you to make sure St. Louis Park continues to be a great, and safe, place to work, live, and learn.