

Dear Parents,

The recent tragedy at Stoneman Douglas High School in Florida has shaken all of us - educators and parents alike - and brought renewed attention to the threat of school violence and the ongoing debate around gun control. Each and every day we gather 393 eager learners and 50 staff members together in the warm halls of Travell School to learn and grow together. It is heartwarming to see students line up eagerly and enter the building chatting with their friends. While the day is full of joy and hard work, it also comes with incredible responsibility to ensure the safety of all involved. Over the past week I have received questions about our procedures. I hope this email reassures parents that we are trained to take care of your children and have excellent security measures in place; also I hope it enables you to reassure your own children and engage in a conversation well-equipped to answer questions.

- Travell School is a locked facility during school hours. All parents and visitors enter through the Bogert doors. We do screen visitors through a camera and intercom system. **What you can do to help:** When you buzz at the building, please be patient and answer questions such as your name, who your child is and the purpose of your visit. Even though you might be a "frequent flyer", the office is a busy place and Mrs. Manahan and Mrs. Mead take each buzz seriously! **Also, please do not allow other people to enter with you unless you announce the person through the intercom system as well.** For example, once I am buzzed in, if Dr. Fishbein approaches, I would press the button and say, "I'm coming in with Dr. Fishbein." If it is someone that you do not know, please ask them to buzz in separately.
- All visitors are required to sign in and out at the main office. If a visitor does not sign in at the office, it may lead to a lockdown situation involving the police. **What you can do to help:** Please make sure to sign in each time you visit the building and remind other visitors that they should do the same. **Also,** limit your need to visit the school for drop-offs of water bottles and instruments. Forgotten lunches should be dropped off in the cooler outside the Bogert entrance. The less traffic we have in and out of the building for those items, the better!
- Our students are experts at fire drills! We have one fire drill a month and chart the time that it takes to exit the building. I am careful to vary the time of day and day of the week to ensure that students practice in a variety of settings.
- We also practice a Safety Drill each month. While these drills are for different circumstances, they fall into two primary categories: Lockdown and Evacuation. A Lockdown Drill requires a class to move to a private section of the classroom where they cannot be viewed from the door and sit quietly with the lights off; the door is locked. An Evacuation Drill requires all students and staff to exit the building and move to a safe location. Each month we alternate the drills, mixing up the day of the week and time of day. We have been running these drills for years, and we try to improve each time. Many times police officers join me as I walk around the building making sure everything is secure.
- There is an annual review of our Crisis Manuals each summer to update information and ensure that the support staff throughout the district, and the police/fire, have accurate information.
- Most importantly, there are specific measures in place to proactively create a culture of care in Travell. Our character education program, Open Circle, is taught every week in class. We have monthly All School Read Alouds to promote fairness, inclusion and kindness!

Many parents have asked how to talk about these drills with their children in an appropriate way. Each child is different and balancing the need for honesty with developmental readiness can be difficult. An easy and honest explanation is, *We practice these drills so that we know what to do in an*

*emergency. An emergency can be a fire, a medical issue for a staff member or student, or something dangerous in the building. We do not always know when an emergency will occur and what will happen, but if we practice these drills, we will do a great job keeping ourselves safe.*

At Travell, we work very hard to keep our children safe and protected physically and emotionally. While we have mandated drills and safety precautions, we also try to have an overriding feeling of love and respect that permeates all that we do – always. We want our children to feel safe coming to school - because they are.

The Ridgewood elementary schools are all planning to take some time out on **March 14** to focus on the ideals of inclusion and belonging as we all share in the same book, *I'm Here* by Peter Reynolds. As a school and in the classrooms we plan to talk about belonging and friendship – acceptance and love.

I am happy to answer any questions about safety and security. Keeping everyone healthy and safe is the commitment of all parents, staff and students. I appreciate all you do to help. I also assure you that I take the safety of all 393 students as my absolute top priority.

Fondly,  
Dr. Leininger