

From the desk of Superintendent Michelle Jensen...

Recent school violence has raised awareness of safety in our schools and communities. In light of recent tragedies, I would like to stress two very important topics that can help us keep our children safe. One is increased communication among children, parents, school staff, and community members. The second is the need to control access of weapons to children. Both are significant in our continuing efforts to keep children safe in our schools.

Student disengagement has frequently been the alleged cause for violent acts in our schools. Disengaged students often feel like they don't fit in with a peer group, can feel harassed or bullied by others, and sometimes struggle to see the value of education in general. However, these same students frequently share these feelings out loud with others around them. This sparks the continued need for open communication between all members of our community. Student-to-student and child-to-parent conversations often reveal this type of information. Parents and students can play key roles in listening for warning signs that other students might voice and are encouraged to contact school personnel such as the classroom teacher, building principal, guidance counselor, psychologist, or myself to share their concerns. Respect and kindness for all individuals is another necessity that fulfills the basic needs for all people. Our efforts in modeling this behavior and expecting it from each other help to make an impact on student interactions.

Recently, the Wisconsin State Journal began a campaign, with the help of area hospitals and clinics, to distribute free gun locks. While this is not the only means to prevent violence, it can provide an added measure of safety for guns stored in the home. Free gun locks are available at the Deerfield Police Department, UW Health East and West Clinics, Meriter Hospital and St. Mary's Hospital. Some essential safety tips for parents with guns in the home are:

- Always removing ammunition from firearms before storage.
- Storing firearms in an out-of-sight location that is also out of reach of children.
- Placing ammunition in a locked location separate from firearms.
- Securing unloaded firearms with a gun lock or other security devices that reduce the risks of unauthorized use and tampering.
- Storing firearms unloaded in a locked gun cabinet, safe or secured gun vault.
- Storing guns and gun lock keys separately, and storing gun lock keys separately from regularly used keys.

As in many small communities, the school is the central hub for student and community activity. We all want to be assured that the school day and afterschool events are safe. All of us working together to look and listen for warning signs that children might share and providing controlled gun access are a means to continuing to provide a safe school environment for our children and our community.