



## Binghamton City School District

164 Hawley Street  
PO Box 2126  
Binghamton, NY 13902-2126  
Phone: (607) 762-8100  
Fax: (607) 762-8110

**January 14, 2022**

Dear BHS Families,

I'm writing today to provide you with an update on the progress we have made surrounding safety in and around Binghamton High School, and what additional steps we will be taking in the days and weeks ahead.

I first want to acknowledge that this situation is tough for so many. As I've spoken with families, students, and staff over the past several weeks, it is clear that this has been an incredibly emotional school year and we must be aware of, and sensitive to, the stress our school community is experiencing. The stress of the safety challenges we are facing, combined with the mental health impacts of nearly two years of a global pandemic, cannot be overstated. I will be vulnerable in letting you know that we, as administrators and faculty working to address these issues and concerns, recognize that we do not have all the answers and look to others across the region and state for ideas and solutions. Reaching out to ask for support if you are struggling, or seeking support for others who may be struggling, are both actions to be proud of, and steps that I encourage us to take.

We also know that some of what we are experiencing are truly symptoms of larger safety issues in our community and extend beyond Binghamton High School. We are working with our local leaders, such as the city's mayor and police chief, to address the impact of those community safety issues on our students and schools, and what can be done to help. We have also been communicating with leaders in other school districts that have faced similar challenges and we have gotten some excellent advice and information from those conversations.

Since our return to in-person instruction, there is a noticeable difference in the climate at BHS, and based on feedback from staff and students, we truly have made some outstanding progress creating an environment that is safe both physically and social-emotionally, where all students and faculty can teach and learn. I believe that is something we should all be Patriot proud of. I have been working in the building each day following the movement to remote learning on Dec. 16 in order to support our school community directly and ensure that I have a firsthand understanding of the challenges we are facing, the resources needed, and the impacts of the new measures we've put in place.

The impact of COVID-related personnel issues is real and substantial. Schools, like so many other industries, are facing a staffing crisis that has made our current challenges even more significant. We have addressed this by shifting some positions, such as moving open school monitor positions to Teaching Assistant roles, where we can offer a higher salary, stronger career path, and a position more closely connected to instruction. Additionally, we brought in a local, private company, which has been carefully vetted by the district, to support safety. This was an additional step we took to fill the vacant positions of safety officers and complement our safety team. Since returning to the building, we have been grateful for the presence of additional retired administrators, especially while two of our building principals were out. Principal Kevin Richman was out last week due to

COVID-19 but has remained extremely engaged and focused on our efforts. These retirees acted not as administrators, but as hall walkers, helping to ensure safety while new safety personnel were being trained. Their support has been so valuable, especially due to their knowledge of our students and the building.

Last week, we installed our new Safe Scan system. We've found that the system has been effective in both identifying potential threats and in helping us decrease the time associated with bag checks by decreasing the number of necessary bag checks. Today, only 37 percent of students brought in an object that triggered an alarm, a decrease of 15 percent since its installation. Previous to the use of this system, all students' bags were checked as they arrived. On the first day that the system was in place, we recovered three knives, two of which were voluntarily handed over by students and one taser. A few days later, one small container of Mace. No other weapons have been recovered since the first day of installation. Most importantly, we've heard very positive feedback from students, as well as faculty and staff, who have shared that they feel safer in our building because of this technology. Any student who has demonstrated or voiced a concern has had an individual opportunity to better understand the purpose of the technology.

We strongly believe in hearing the voices of our students and using their feedback to guide our decisions. Since Thursday's incident, we have asked our students for their ideas and input regarding our policies surrounding lunch. Currently, only juniors and seniors are allowed to leave campus for lunch. So far, the survey has indicated that students want to leave campus during lunch to have more food options and to get a break from school. We are exploring options, including whether we need to further limit which grade levels are permitted to leave for lunch, or whether this should be an opportunity earned for students. COVID has complicated the issue, placing limits on the number of seats available in the cafeteria. We are also looking to provide alternative program options during lunch periods that would combine eating with other activities. There are many things to be considered when addressing an open campus and we are asking parents to weigh in by completing a survey which can be found on our website. The survey for families also addresses communication, youth and family engagement, social-emotional support, and school and community safety.

In addition, we are currently exploring how to increase transportation options for our students. Currently, 60 percent of our students do not qualify for transportation due to the close proximity of their residences to our school buildings. We are looking to the New York State Education Department (NYSED) for support, and we are advocating for additional resources under the Child Safety Zone educational law. We will continue to fight to ensure that our small city school district receives the support our students and schools deserve.

We will also continue striving for strong communication and honest transparency so that we can become a school that our students, families, and employees can truly be proud of. I urge our BHS families to join district and high school leadership, along with Mayor Kraham, Chief Zikuski, and high school faculty to participate in next week's Family Workshop on Thursday, Jan. 20. The meeting is open to families, faculty, and staff, and will take place from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. via Zoom. The format will allow individuals to hear more information on what is in place, openly voice their ideas and ask questions. Please use this link to register in advance to assist us in planning and organizing the event.

I am committed, as is Mr. Richman, to continue to share the status of BHS and the progress being made. Thank you for your support as we move forward to create a sustained, safe environment.

With Patriot Pride,



Dr. Tonia Thompson  
Superintendent of Schools

*Educating, empowering, and challenging all students to become productive, global citizens through innovative approaches to learning.*