

Alex and Cesar,

I am anticipating that this will be my fifth unanswered communication to you all regarding school safety in DPS.

With the shooting a block from East two weeks ago and the absurd over-reaction to the threat today, my concerns have grown in regard to you and your leadership team's ability to keep our children safe.

The response to today's unfounded threat (exactly the type of threat the school received well over twenty times last year), was unnecessary. It was an overreaction coated in messaging that you can never be too safe. It was over-traumatizing (to many thousands of students, teachers, and parents) represented a complete inability to be prepared for such a circumstance and to respond in a way that is supportive and appropriate, and significantly increased the likelihood that the event will reoccur in the near future. Even communications were a mess, telling parents that there would be a reunification event before any communication that there was a problem at all.

My concern, as stated previously, is that you and your team just do not know what to do. The reality of the damaged relationship and partnership between DPD and DPS, and the lack of experience on your leadership team that would allow them to create and engage preventive and responsive plans, absolutely exacerbate the concerns represented in this email. It's OK to acknowledge what you do not know what to do, as long as you gain access to the learning and support it takes to grow for our community.

From what we have seen, your leadership team is not currently prepared to act, to respond to threats and safety events, and to support schools in ways that mitigate the impact of threats and violent events.

I am, and have always been, all in for my kids and every young person in DPS. I offer my experience and capacity to support your responsibility to ensure the safety of DPS students. Right now, you are not able to confidently represent that our students are physically and emotionally safe. You need to change that fast.

Again, feel free to call if you would like to respond or gain support.

Sincerely,

John

12/5/21

Alex and Mike,

I hope you are well and have enjoyed a relaxing weekend.

I've included the content of my last email at the end of this note, as the relevance of the content has increased with the tragedies of the last week have now become even more urgent.

Friday afternoon East received yet another school violence threat. This was the 14th since April. This weekend, the principal has dealt with rumors, fear, and ongoing concerns with no meaningful support from the central offices. This is a lonely and difficult place to be, speaking from experience.

My concern is that neither of you may know what to do. My greater concern is that you, through fear or a lack of direction, may not be making the moves necessary to develop the ideas and engage the actions that our school leaders and school communities need to be led with right now. My hope is that you are making those moves, but currently, that is not being seen.

The lack of representation of concern and communication related to our current realities and necessary next steps are distressing to our school leaders and exacerbating the distress caused by threat in our school communities. Even if you may not be hearing this, clearly, it is the case. You may not be hearing because they may believe that they are just supposed to be strong and know what to do. No one should be that strong, nor independently know what to do, during these challenging moments. We need to find a place of understanding, strength, action, and confidence together, through your leadership.

While my requests noted below are still significant priorities, I also recommend that you communicate with school leadership to listen, provide resources, and represent a path through the current context. You, as previously noted, are fully responsible for the action or the inaction of our school district. I truly hope that you create and execute the action that ensures the safety of the children and staff members that we serve in our schools.

Respectfully,

John Youngquist

11/28/21

Alex and Michael,

I hope you have enjoyed some moments away from your work and with your incredible families.

In the last week, I have had time to reflect back on the number of times that, over the course of the semester, our school has experienced the threat of bombs and school shootings.

At East High School, in just the last several weeks, we have had five shooting or bomb threats occur during school hours. As you know, over the course of the week before break, nine students were shot at or near their schools just miles away in Aurora. Thank goodness none were killed. These are challenging times for the sense of safety that you must provide at each school site. These are also times that are challenging the school board and district's decision to cut School Resource Officers from our school sites.

The lack of an SRO at East High School has, from my experienced perspective, resulted in a significant loss of resources increasing the potential for school violence to occur and decreasing our ability to respond effectively to threats and acts of violence.

In response to each of the recent East threat events, DPD and DPS Safety have arrived with little knowledge of the reality in our school building. They have also arrived with no level of communication or coordination between the organizations. In each of the East threat situations, the DPD time taken to travel, to interpret the context, to engage in decision-making in support of the site leadership has now become in the range of fifteen-twenty minutes instead of the two minute response time that was present when an SRO was on our school grounds. In these circumstances the more time it takes to respond appropriately the more dangerous a situation may become. As I am certain you are aware, the presence of SROs at both of the recent Aurora shooting sites is known to have both provided an intervention limiting the number of victims in those situations and providing immediate first aid to those who were victims of the shooters.

The removal of our SROs was understood to be a positive action responsive to the intimidation and unease that students may experience, especially our Black students, when an armed officer is present. The stated rationale for this decision, "to make sure all students in all of our schools, especially our students of color, feel safe and protected," (Tay Anderson), was paired with the thought that "there is absolutely nothing more important than all of our students feeling safe, cared for, and protected in our school," (Susana Cordova). These are important driving interests for every school community. It is vital that we take anti-racist action to end the school to prison pipeline and ensure that equity-based actions drive our cultural and academic efforts in every school.

I believe that there is a concerning and unintended consequence that is occurring with our students. Our reality is that, now, instead of our one known and trusted SRO having a relatively subtle presence in the school building we have had approximately thirty different DPD officers and armed DPS Safety officers enter our doors. They have entered to support incidents of mandatory reporting, to be responsive to threats and other momentary crises, and to partner with our student support personnel.

This more random "police" presence has significantly shifted the affective response to uniformed and armed officers that our students represent in our building. Never before have I witnessed the sudden and overt emotional escalation of our students, especially our Black students, to police presence, like I am seeing this year. As our students tell it, this is happening because they "do not know those cops." Our students have represented that the SRO they knew was not of great concern to them. However, now, new, untrusted faces present for unknown but seemingly urgent reasons create an immediate emotional surge, an escalation in observed behavior. which is of great concern.

As a DPS parent of two secondary students and an experienced professional in the context of our schools, I am making a multi-tiered request with the hope of securing a higher level of emotional safety at school for our Black students and securing a higher level of physical safety at school for all of our students.

I am requesting that the following actions take place:

1. Survey and report the status of all secondary school Black Excellence Plans providing data relating to the presence of actions supporting the emotional safety of and valuing the presence and experience of Black students in DPS
2. Survey and report the current status of student services professionals that are available at all secondary school sites with the intention of funding for a sufficient level of preventive services at these sites into the future
3. Survey and report the number of threat-based events requiring crisis response and support at school sites and events that are occurring now in comparison with the 18-19 and 19-20 school years (semester one in 19-20)
4. Create and implement a plan ensuring that all secondary school sites have on-site DPD or DPS Safety support providing an immediate partner to respond to crisis-related situations (DPS CSOs do not provide a qualified presence for this service)
5. Return SROs to school sites greater than 1,000 students to provide safety consultation, mandatory safety services, threat mitigation and response, and violence prevention

Thanks to both of you for taking the time to review my communication and provide a response to the requests. My belief is that Denver Public Schools is able to provide the "safe and protected," environment that is the superintendent's responsibility to provide at every school site, that the current context does not fully represent this, and that you have the power and the capacity to take the action necessary to ensure it.

Much appreciated,  
John Youngquist