

For Immediate Release

December 4, 2019

Contact: Mary Whitrock, Superintendent

WhitrockM@ripon.k12.wi.us

(920) 748-4600

Active Threat Alarm at Ripon Middle School and Ripon High School

Ripon, WI - The Ripon Area School District sent the following message from Superintendent Dr. Mary Whitrock to parents and the Ripon community yesterday.

"Today, December 3, 2019, shortly after 12:30 p.m., the active threat alarm system was inadvertently activated by staff at the Ripon High School though there was not a threat at any school in the district.

Given the incident at Waukesha and Oshkosh this week, our staff was reviewing protocol and the RHS and RMS alarm system was inadvertently activated. All students were safe.

Our number one priority is student safety in all situations. While RHS staff was working to deactivate the alarm and notify RMS & RHS students & staff that there was not a threat, the district's communication team was receiving information from RHS on what had occurred. The information was sent out to the City of Ripon Police Department and then to parents through an IC email blast, and an announcement on the district website. Shortly thereafter, the message was posted on our district Facebook page. It did take time after the alarm was triggered for staff to understand what occurred, work to deactivate the alarm and inform the police and parents.

The staff will review what occurred in an effort to prevent such an incident from ever occurring in the future. Please know that students and staff are always notified prior to any active threat drills because our district's safety team understands the stress and emotion such drills evoke in both students and staff. We apologize for any undue stress to students, staff and

their families which this event caused. Our school counselors are available to students as they process this event which happened today in our district as well as the events across the state.

This experience tested our emergency protocols and we can reaffirm students and staff responded accordingly to the alert using our ALICE procedure. ALICE stands for: Alert, Lockdown, Inform, Counter, Evacuate. Students and staff have practiced this response and used it today.

Thank you to everyone for their understanding and patience during this situation. The recent incidents in our Wisconsin schools have put all staff on high alert as they work to ensure the safety of your children and all of our Ripon Area School District staff.”

Dr. Whitrock shared, “Yesterday, our principals checked in with teachers and students after the incident and apologized for the undue anxiety and stress. This morning, our middle school and high school staff met before school to debrief the situation. While the incident was unplanned, it did serve as an opportunity to review our procedures and response. The debrief allowed staff to talk about their responses and ask questions of each other. As educators, we take every opportunity to learn and continuously improve.”

When asked about activation of the alarm, Dr. Whitrock shared, “The staff who activated the system feel terrible about the incident. I cannot apologize enough for the stress this caused, yet I am so appreciative of our staff and their understanding of the level of responsibility they have to be able to alert others to take action. I am proud of our staff who act as our first line of defense against an intruder. None of us created the current stressful situation we live in and these are new roles we are asking members of our team to take on. I would much rather have what happened today, as difficult as it was, than to have us need the alarm and no one capable of sending it out.”

Dr. Whitrock went on to add, “As educators, we are all in this together. The event at Oshkosh West High School yesterday and the earlier event at Waukesha put everyone on high alert. Several staff have children in the Oshkosh District and were enroute to the reunification

site yesterday. Despite these difficult circumstances, much was gained from the experience. We are so appreciative of our parents and their understanding of the event. Many have expressed support knowing this occurred because staff were working to be prepared for an emergency situation.”

High School Principal Randy Hatlen commented, “While this was a mistake, a lot of good came out of it and we need to use what was learned. With that said, we are not minimizing the effect it had on our students, staff, parents, and community. We were able to learn a great deal about our system activation process and also how each of us reacted to the unexpected alarm. Our students and staff were amazing in their response.”

Any comments or questions, please contact Dr. Mary Whitrock at (920) 748-4600.

###