

Good morning, this is Steve Mares, Principal of Athens Drive Magnet High School.

Because I want to keep you informed, I would like you to be aware of an incident that we investigated overnight.

Last night, a student posted a vague social media threat that was reported to Raleigh Police, who quickly informed Wake County Public School System (WCPSS) Security personnel. In response, Raleigh Police, in conjunction with Cary Police, visited the student's home and determined the threat was a hoax. I have already addressed the hoax with the student and parent. The hoax posed no threat to the school.

We did choose to have extra Raleigh Police and WCPSS Security personnel on campus this morning in case others became aware of the baseless threat as we were completing the investigation and our students were preparing for school. It was a routine school opening and we are having a normal, productive day of teaching and learning.

As you know, we take all threats seriously and work with law enforcement and the courts. With this news, I ask for your help.

In recent months, there have been a rash of hoax threats nationally, including the one we received earlier in the year. These "fake" threats begin with a call or note of warning for when the threat will occur. It's important to point out that not a single actual school shooting or other act of violence was preceded by a note to the victims. However, every hoax threat thus far has been preceded by a note.

In addition, these hoax threats increase in number when our local media outlets report them. Individuals see these news reports on TV and on social media and may try to replicate the hoax threats for attention. They may not understand the seriousness of making such threats or fully understand the consequences they may face.

This phenomenon is called "copycat behavior." To protect our students, WCPSS is encouraging local news outlets to limit the reporting of hoax threats, as studies show those media reports risk public safety and the safety of our children. Because the perpetrators of hoax threats feed off the media frenzy and school chaos they create, every effort will be made by school administrators and local officials to professionally handle these incidents without giving the perpetrators the attention they seek.

Among the many negative impacts of hoax threats is the lack of empathy for those communities directly impacted by school shootings. It is important that children understand the harsh implications, both legal and social, of imitating such events.

I ask that you talk with your student about the seriousness of making threats of any kind. Equally important, encourage them to report any suspicious activity to a trusted adult at school or to you. Students and parents can also report safety concerns to our anonymous tip line, (919) 856-1911.

Please know that I appreciate your continued support of a safe learning environment for our students, staff, and entire school family.