

Letter: Connecticut tragedy a reminder about safety in Tahoe schools

To the community,

An unspeakable tragedy occurred at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Conn., when a gunman opened fire Friday, killing 20 students and eight adults. This horrific act has left us numb and deeply saddened at the loss of these innocent people with so much of their future ahead of them.

When tragedy strikes, the results are traumatic, both for those directly affected and for the community of people who know them or identify with them. But when something like this happens at a school, to very young children, it hits closer to home and we may feel helpless.

At noon today, Superintendent Jim Tarwater ordered all Lake Tahoe Unified schools on Yellow Alert. Schools were requested to secure all perimeter entrances and monitor school grounds as a precautionary measure against the possibility of a copycat act in our area.

Staff members were asked to be extra vigilant. Administrators and security personnel increased surveillance at schools and continued to be on heightened alert and high visibility until after the dismissal of school today.

Flags at all schools were ordered to half staff in honor of the victims.

Teachers were not directed to discuss this tragedy with the children; parents can decide how best to approach their child with this news.

Although we cannot control the fact that a tragedy has taken

place, adults can do a great deal to help children regain their emotional safety.

This website contains useful advice for parents in dealing with tragic events.

As part of normal operations of the school district, all campuses have comprehensive, up-to-date safety plans in place to address a variety of emergency conditions. The plans are reinforced through drills with students and at regular meetings with our employees.

I'd like to take this opportunity to remind you of a few tips to ensure your child's safety:

- Update your child's emergency card information throughout the school year. Contact your school if there are any changes.
- Sign-in and sign-out of the front office. Knowing who is on our campuses is for your safety as well as the children.
- Wear a "Visitor's" badge throughout your stay.
- If you are on campus and you see someone who is not wearing any kind of identification, please approach them and inquire who they are.

How will you know what's going on during an emergency at LTUSD schools?

- Wait for a Connect-Ed call to your home or cell phone. Whatever you list on the emergency card goes into our system – Aeries.
- Wait for an email from the superintendent.
- Listen to local radio and local television stations.
- Use your computer to go to websites that post "current news" such as *Lake Tahoe News*, *Tahoe Tribune*, or KCRA.

- Turn on the television for news breaking events on national television.
- Subscribe to email alerts from newspapers and TV stations in our area.

Please follow these Dos and Don'ts

DO

- Keep your child's emergency card information updated. It's how the Connect-Ed call out system can stay accurate.
- Be familiar with the emergency procedures at your child's school.
- Follow all instructions by school staff and agencies during an event. The safety of all is at stake.

DON'T

- Go to the school site. Your child is being kept safe and you coming may tie up needed space on the roads.
- Contact your child by cell phone. You could be tying up the needed cell phone lines available to emergency personnel and school staff.

In any emergency situation, specific response strategies depend on the nature and scope of the incident and prevailing conditions. In most incidents, public safety and emergency management personnel play a critical role in identifying the specific nature, cause, and extent of the emergency, as well as providing guidance to administrators on the response steps that must be carried out.

Your children are surrounded daily by professionals who have dedicated their lives to helping their students; in the event of an emergency, you can count on these caring individuals to keep your children secure. All employees in the LTUSD continue

to work to make all our schools safe and secure environments.

If you have questions about your child's safety and school support responses, please contact your principal. If your child is experiencing any anxiety about this tragedy over the weekend, please contact your principal who will contact one of our school psychologists to talk to your child.

Your understanding, support, and cooperation are vital as we take these precautionary actions on behalf of our students.

And finally, although I don't even need to say this, hug your children a little closer tonight. Our hearts and prayers go out to those whose loved ones were taken away from them all too suddenly today. May they rest in peace.

Take care,

Angie Keil, LTUSD