**Superintendent’s Student & Staff Accomplishments**

**September 18, 2024**

**School Safety Update:**

On Friday, a number of parents kept their children home from school citing a concern about school safety after receiving the ParentLink message we sent out to inform all parents of a hoax threat message that was being circulated on social media sites across the nation. I understand parents are extremely concerned whenever they hear of a possible social media post threatening possible violence against a school, even when the alleged threat has been determined to be not credible by authorities. Since this was our first widespread social media hoax threat of this school year, we will count the student absences that were reported by parents as due to a school safety concern on Friday as excused absences. Moving forward, if our schools are open for the school day and parents determine to keep their children home, the absences will be marked as unexcused. We will be sending a letter home very soon on this attendance consideration and include additional information that may help reassure parents about our school safety procedures.

When we are alerted to a possible school threat, our first step is to contact our law enforcement partners. In last week’s case, we were also in contact with an Investigative Analyst from the PA Attorney General’s Office and an analyst from Safer Schools Together. Our law enforcement partners also notified the PA Criminal Intelligence Center about the social media posts for additional analysis and assistance. If needed, the FBI is also alerted. All of these school safety experts work with us to help us determine if a social media post is credible or not credible, and if we should consider adding additional safety measures at our schools. We don’t make such serious determinations and decisions about school safety in a vacuum. All available factors and details are weighed very carefully to determine our best course of action. If there is doubt among the experts, my team and myself, I can guarantee you that I would close our schools.

One of the partners I mentioned is Safer Schools Together. This is a new consulting and threat analysis service we started using this school year, because they have the unique capability to quickly scan social media and news sites from across states and the nation to help determine if a threat is specific and unique to our schools or if this is part of a larger hoax being circulated among social media sites. Safer Schools Together analysists were quickly able to match the screenshots of the alleged threats to exactly the same hoax posts from other states that had been reposted and shared for several days prior to hitting our area.

How Parents and Students Can Help:

Parents and students can help the district keep our schools safe by immediately reporting any alleged threats against our schools to the proper authorities. During school hours anyone with knowledge of an alleged threat made against a school should report it immediately to the principal and/or 9-1-1. If the threat is imminent and specific, it should be reported directly to 9-1-1. After school hours, alleged threats against schools should be reported to the Safe2Say Something anonymous reporting system and/or by calling 9-1-1. If a threat is specific and believed to be imminent, again parents and students should call 9-1-1 immediately.

Also, we are asking parents and students to please refrain from reposting and sharing possible social media threats with others. While we know everyone is trying to help, the reposts and shares can actually hinder our ability to investigate possible threats. Seconds count when it comes to possible school threats, so any delay in relaying the information directly to the proper authorities is of great concern.

**Outstanding Visual Arts Community:** I am very proud to announce that Pocono Mountain School District has been recognized for the fifth consecutive year by PA Education Association (PAEA) as an Outstanding Visual Arts Community. Our team of Visual Arts educators will be recognized at the 2025 PAEA Art State Conference in Pittsburgh next year for achieving this important designation for 5 years.

**EPC Golf Results:** Congratulations to Pocono Mountain East Sophomore Madeline VanBuskirk on placing 4th in the EPC Girls Golf Tournament. Also, the East Boys Golf Team placed 4th overall in the tournament.

**Celebration of the Arts Music Festival:** Nine student musicians represented Pocono Mountain School District and their schools at the Delaware Water Gap Jazz Festival Celebration of the Arts (COTA). Students from various high schools rehearsed twice a week since the beginning of August to perform in the Celebration of the Arts Jazz Ensemble. Congratulations to East High School student musicians *Declan Angulo, Jaiden Cumberbatch, Alan Angulo and Finn McGovern, and West High School student musicians* Nicholas Gesualdi, Maya dos Santos, Kayla Perez, Mya Aragona-Young and Justin Carter on their outstanding performances.

**AP Scholars:** We have great news to report on our AP Scholars program for 2024.

Congratulations to our AP Capstone Diploma Award winners Austin Fein, Collin Keller and Ayden Rowe from the West High School and Gavin Demler from the East High School.

In addition, in 2024 the district had 78 students qualify as AP Scholars, 38 for the East High School and 40 for the West High School. Of those 78 AP Scholars, 14 students earned AP Scholar with Honor Awards, 13 students earned AP Scholar with Distinction Awards, and 5 students earned AP Seminar and Research Certificates.

**PSBA Honor Roll:** Tonight, we get to recognize two of our school board directors who are now on the PSBA Honor Roll for their 5 years of dedication, commitment, contributions and service to the Pocono Mountain School District and Board of Education. Thank you to Mr. Ronnie Byrd and Mr. Stephen Watto, our PSBA 5 Year Honor Roll members.