

Notice: Explanation of the events of March 9, 2015 – School Evacuation

The reason for this notice is to explain the sequence of events that happened from Friday March 6th through Tuesday March 10th.

At about 12:45pm, on Friday March 6th, a written threat was found on the wall of a bathroom stall. Once the message was discovered, it was immediately communicated to Mr. Strever, our assistant principal, who then called the State Police. The written message references a bomb to be set off on Monday. The window of time during which this message was written is broad. It likely happened between Thursday afternoon (about 4pm) and Friday afternoon (about 12:45pm).

When the State Police were here on Friday afternoon, we conducted a walk-through of all classrooms and community spaces such as the cafeteria, room 133, the library, bathrooms, etc. Nothing out of the ordinary was found.

As a result of the threat, the recommendation of the police was to have all students and staff enter the building on **Monday morning, March 9th**, using one of the three main entrances in the front of the original building. It was also recommended that bags be searched for any signs related to the written threat. I understand that this was an inconvenience for all of us – but in matters like these it is important to comply with the recommendations from the police.

The police described this as a “low risk” threat, but it was important for us to take the threat very seriously and use their expertise to guide how this situation should be handled.

Bags and backpacks were searched on Monday morning and there was nothing found out of the ordinary. At the morning announcements I explained to the students the reason why we searched their bags.

On Monday at 8:16 a.m. Parents were sent this email describing the events mentioned above:

Parents of HVRHS students,

At about 12:45pm, on Friday March 6th, a written threat was found on the wall of a bathroom stall. Once the message was discovered, it was immediately communicated to Mr. Strever, our assistant principal, who then called the State Police. The written message references a bomb to be set off on Monday. The window of time during which this message was written is broad. It likely happened between Thursday afternoon (about 4pm) and Friday afternoon (about 12:45pm).

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The police describe this as a “low risk” threat, but we are taking it very seriously and using their expertise to guide how this situation is handled.

I made an announcement to the student body this morning informing them of the reason why we searched their bags.

Sincerely,

*Jose Martinez, Ed.D.
Principal, Housatonic Valley Regional H.S.
Falls Village, Connecticut*

Later on Monday morning the school’s safety and security consultant, Brian Ohler, met with Mr. Strever and me and recommended that we should evacuate the building as a precaution. This recommendation was discussed and I decided to conduct an evacuation of the building. This happened around 10:00 am. The reasoning behind this decision centered on the high volume of traffic in the building over the weekend and the possibility of someone acting on the threat.

Please note that I consider the safety and security of our children and staff as my most important job responsibility. I would never have had students or staff enter the building in the morning if I felt that they would be in danger.

On Monday at 10:11a.m. I sent parents the following email:

Dear parents of HVRHS students,

In the past, we have run a practice evacuation to rehearse our ability to exit the building in a safe and orderly fashion. As a precautionary measure, we are going to run an evacuation today. I am making the decision to evacuate the building and have all students and staff moved to an alternative location. I will address the building with our plan to board school buses and go to Salisbury Prep School until the police can clear the building for our return.

Arrangements were made to transport students off campus. Students were bused to Salisbury School. The evacuation was closely supervised by school staff and the children were very cooperative.

As a precaution, the police K-9 unit brought a dog that is trained to find explosives to search the building. The police did a visual inspection of classrooms and open spaces and the dog searched the school as well. Nothing was found.

Students were then transported back to the school without incident.

At about 1:20pm Mr. Strever and I addressed the students and staff over the school PA system to give details about why the evacuation was done and how that event proceeded.

Tuesday March 10th.

School opened normally today. At about 10:00 a.m. the following message was sent to parents via email and school messenger (voice):

Parents,

A vague written threat message was found on the wall in a bathroom this morning. Police have been notified and are at the school as a precaution. I will update you as more information comes my way.

I will let you know as soon as possible what are actions will be.

*Jose Martinez, Ed.D.
Principal, Housatonic Valley Regional H.S.
Falls Village, Connecticut*

At about 12:00 p.m. The police and school administration resolved this issue. Appropriate disciplinary actions will be taken by administration.

At 12:47 p.m. Parents were emailed and sent a phone message:

On Tue, Mar 10, 2015 at 12:47 PM, Dr. Jose Martinez <jmartinez@hvrhs.org> wrote:

The incident that occurred earlier today (writing on wall - an inappropriate message) has been resolved.

Follow up:

I have spoken with a number of students, teachers, board of education members, and parents about these events. Here are some things we learned about handling a situation like this.

1. Students and staff handled the evacuation exceedingly well. All students were carefully supervised and respectful of the process we used.
2. On Monday, parents were alerted via email shortly after students entered the building and again when the evacuation began.

3. The school needs to do a better job of communicating to parents and community members, including First Selectmen, of the event and the reason(s) for the event.
4. The school's safety committee will meet later this month and discuss ways to improve communication and alerts in emergency situations.
5. We will examine ways to utilize social media to better inform the staff, students and parents when necessary.