Dear Franklin Township Public School Families:

As you are likely aware, late last month a school shooting occurred at a high school in Oxford, Michigan. Since that time social media challenges have led to several incidents over the last several weeks involving general threats to public places and schools. Earlier this week a threat of this kind hit very close to home, when a neighboring district was made aware of an internet threat at its high school. Although the threat in that case involved another district, we did work quickly with our local police to confirm that our students were not in harm's way and ensured our campuses were safe. With that said, I want to take an opportunity to reassure you that safety and security is a top priority in the Franklin Township Public Schools.

After the tragic shooting in Parkland, Florida in 2018, the Franklin Township Board of Education engaged Shield 32, a security audit company, and authorized it to conduct a comprehensive safety and security audit for the district. The more than 30-page report contained a number of recommendations in the areas of planning, emergency drill procedures, equipment, emergency response, physical facilities, staffing, cyber security and school climate. Although the contents of the report are confidential for security reasons, I would like to take this opportunity to highlight a number of the improvements the district has made with regard to these recommendations.

First and foremost, the district has developed a comprehensive emergency response and management plan that is housed in all district schools and offices, electronically and in paper format. The plan has also been shared widely with the appropriate authorities at the local, county and state levels. The plan is reviewed and updated annually, ensuring it remains relevant. District staff work with students to drill all types of situations beyond a typical fire drill. In addition, the district has committed the necessary resources to update and improve school surveillance systems and now has the capability to share video and audio with emergency responders as necessary and at a moment's notice. The district has also upgraded its communication systems and now has the ability to connect directly across campuses and with local law enforcement in the event of an emergency, from anywhere in the district and from most locations throughout Franklin Township. At each campus, “panic buttons” have been strategically deployed, giving school personnel another mechanism for notifying local authorities about emergency situations. As a school district, we continue to have a strong partnership with local law enforcement agencies and work together with them to ensure we are ready to respond and work together when investigating all potential threats to our schools.
As a district we have invested significant resources in recent years, improving our facilities to include what are commonly referred to as “mantraps” at the main points of ingress at all of our schools. In fact, the final few schools needing this work are under construction now and should have completed mantraps within the next few months. We have worked to eliminate points of concealment on our campuses with subtle landscape changes, and we have employed strategies to increase perimeter security with fencing, signage and other suggested tactics. In partnership with the Franklin Township Police Department, we have added to each campus a highly trained Class III Police Officer to enhance and supplement our district’s safety officer teams located at each school building. School security staff have been engaged in de-escalation techniques and have learned emergency response techniques.

As suggested, we continue to work on providing students with more voice and opportunity and encourage them to take an active role in helping to curb violence and improve climate in our schools. Since 2018, each of our schools, including Franklin High School, has an active Positive Behavior Supports in Schools (PBIS) program. We have also partnered with Rutgers Behavioral Health in our district to help support students in crisis and to provide coordinated care to families when needed. We have launched a Positive Impact Mentoring program at Franklin High School to assist and support our most vulnerable students both during and after school hours. As a district we continue to assess school climate and, based on assessment results, make adjustments to improve the overall climate at all levels in our schools.

While no one person can provide a guarantee that a tragedy like the one that occurred in Michigan will not happen in his or her school, what we do know is preparation helps to minimize the risk. With that said, please know that the Board of Education, administrators, faculty and staff at Franklin Township Public Schools take all potential threats seriously and, as mentioned above, are continually working to safeguard our students from potential harm.

Please let me know if you have any further questions or concerns. On behalf of the Board of Education and staff, please have a safe and healthy upcoming Winter Break.

Sincerely,

John A. Ravally, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools