August 21, 2019

Dear T. C. Williams Families,

Alexandria City Public Schools, along with community partners including the Alexandria Police Department, has begun implementing significant changes to our practiced response to physical threats within a school building. The ACPS team is developing, educating and training staff and all students, in an age-appropriate fashion, on how to respond and prepare for the unlikely occurrence of an active shooter or active threat at school. Please know that we are taking into account developmental appropriateness and levels of learning abilities as lessons are being rolled out.

The active shooter/threat strategies come from a program called Alert, Lockdown, Inform, Counter and Evacuate, commonly referred to as ALICE. This process provides appropriate action steps for students and staff to take in order to stay safe in the event of an active shooter or active threat in the school building or on campus. The main objective of this program is to provide students and staff with OPTIONS to increase their chance of survival during an active shooter or active threat emergency.

Alexandria City Public Schools administrators, teachers and staff began ALICE training in the summer of 2017. All T. C. Williams Staff have completed both online and practical training with our instructors during the school year, and we will hold a parent information session at our next PTA meeting. It is now time to educate and train our students by engaging in age-appropriate lessons and practicing age-appropriate scenarios, which will lead to a practical understanding of the safety strategies provided by ALICE.

Over the next few weeks our students will have weekly lessons in the major components of ALICE taught by their classroom teachers and members of our school ALICE Instructor Team. After each lesson your child may have questions about the strategies covered and we are committed to ensuring they are comfortable with this new safety information. Real understanding leads to confidence and confidence leads to safe practice drills. If questions arise at home we can also provide information to you that will help you discuss this important safety topic with your child at night. It is our hope that you can assist us in not only helping our students solidify their understanding of the material, but also discuss how the strategies could be used in settings other than school (church, the mall, a grocery store, etc.).

Our primary focus for students will be on EVACUATION if there were to be an active shooter or threat inside the building. Students will learn the different exits of the building, how to safely run to our reunification point, and actions they can take to keep our school safer (such as not opening exterior doors to known or unknown adults). Depending on grade levels, there are additional skills that will be reviewed, such as barricades, distraction and running away from danger in a zig-zag motion.
It is my absolute priority to keep the children at T.C. Williams safe, loved and happy each day at school. I believe that this training will give us another approach that will support this goal. Just as fire drills become routine after practice, it is my hope that these strategies will become engrained and accessible to our children for the remainder of their lives.

As always, please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions regarding this topic. Thank you for your ongoing support.

Sincerely,

Peter Balas
Principal