

From: [Cohn, Gary](#)
To: [EPS.Maillist](#)
Subject: Thoughts on Tragedies, and Our Role in Responding to Them
Date: Thursday, May 14, 2015 6:05:47 AM
Attachments: [image002.png](#)

Dear Colleague:

This morning, I invite you to join me in sending supportive thoughts (and notes if you feel so moved) to the staff at four schools that have each lost a student recently. In the last several weeks, in separate, unrelated incidents, a Cascade High boy and an Evergreen Middle School girl committed suicide. Last weekend, our neighboring Archbishop Murphy High School lost a girl in a tragic accident. Tuesday night a Jackson Elementary boy lost his battle with cancer.

Losing a student under any circumstance is heart-rending for each of us – more so the closer we are to the situation – and it seems even more so when we have lost a student to suicide. I know this from personal experience, as do too many of our colleagues.

Student suicide happens in our society all too often. Each time, those close to a lost child or that child's family wonder what clue they might have missed, or what fueled such a final decision, or whether they might have done just a little something to alter that young man or woman's choice. Schools are sometimes blamed for not having done enough to prevent the tragedy.

Our school district, like many others, has developed a network of systems to forewarn, intervene, and prevent student self-harm, and change the conditions we can influence that might foster self-harm. This includes intervening to prevent or stop bullying and intimidation.

There is no question in my mind that bullying is a problem in every single school in America. Sadly, I believe this will be an ongoing challenge for us, no matter how good we get at this, no matter how good our policies – and we have very strong policies; no matter how well we practice our procedures – and we have very strong procedures; no matter how much training we provide – and we provide a lot of it, whether it's crisis response training or the suicide response training counselors have engaged in for the last couple of years. Nevertheless, we ARE working this and other problems that society delivers to our schools, and we ARE making a difference. I also know from personal experience we are making a difference – that youngsters are alive to day because of our interventions.

Of course, there are always ways we can improve. We can improve policies and process. We can foster even more community partnerships for our kids, staff, and families. I never want to become complacent about this, to think we've reached the pinnacle or the end of our ability to continuously improve on our work. That is not the Everett Way with respect to graduation rates, with respect to equity and access, with respect to the advocacy work of our staff, and certainly with regard to our harassment, intimidation, and bullying prevention practices.

We honor, respect, and, when appropriate, join in the grief families express after a student death. We step forth or stand ready to help them in any way we can, and on their terms if at all possible.

We honor their wishes and our obligations about privacy and confidentiality.

Sometimes people point to schools or the district when a child is lost. This is not a surprise. You and I both know the public is not likely to hear the full story in a particular case because news cycles are short, because we honor family and student privacy, and because the police honor confidentiality in investigating these tragedies. Sadly, what you do not hear in traditional media, social media, or in public comments at board meetings are the number of successful interventions happening every single day in our 26 schools. You do not hear about the number of times a student or family has received help and support from schools during years of attending elementary, middle and high schools in this district. In most cases we never share individual details of student circumstances or backgrounds – that’s part of our professional responsibility.

We also endeavor to prevent outside influences from disrupting our schools. Such prevention is not always possible, as our Evergreen Middle School community can attest after Monday. What was a school event planned in memory of a classmate on Monday became something entirely different, without warning. I am extremely proud of the way our Evergreen leadership, staff, and SROs responded to Monday’s delicate situation with care, and grace, and calm – and how quickly they returned the school to a safe and nurturing place for students and staff to work, learn and grow together.

We’ll continue this work to support kids and respond to each student’s overt or subtle “cry for help.” We will continue to watch over kids, to listen to them, and to intervene when something isn’t right. We also encourage and count on students and families to come forward to tell us when something needs our attention or special care.

In so many ways, our work truly is a never-ending story. My sincere thanks go to those who supervise kids and schools, and all who work to support kids in our schools. We ARE up to the challenge, and every single day our students are better for it!

Many thanks, and warm wishes,

Gary

p.s. This is short notice about a program some of you may be able to attend tonight at the Community Resource Center in the Port Gardner Room – a program organized by the Cascade High School community and now immediately relevant for even more of us and our school families.

Thursday, May 14, 7–8 p.m.,

Networks for Life: A Parent’s Role in Youth Suicide Prevention

Presented by: Shannon Rauh, Trainer, Youth Suicide Prevention Program

Community Resource Center, Port Gardner Room A, 3900 Broadway, Everett

Youth Suicide Prevention Program Website: www.yspp.org





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