



## ILLINI CENTRAL C.U.S.D #189

208 N. West Avenue, Mason City, IL 62664

Mr. Mike Ward, Superintendent  
www.illinicentral.org  
Phone: (217) 482-5180  
Fax: (217) 482-3323

Dr. Jennifer Durbin, Assistant Superintendent  
Mrs. Cassy Carey, GS Principal  
Mr. Kris Kloba, MS/HS Principal  
Mrs. Annie Baugher, MS/HS Assistant Principal  
Ms. Lori Avart, Special Education Coordinator

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January 3, 2024

Dear Parents and Guardians:

On Monday, December 18th, Illini Central received a call from someone claiming to have a weapon outside of the school, which resulted in lockdown. On Tuesday, December 19th, someone logged into the district's board meeting on Google Meet and made claims of having a bomb in the school. It has been determined that both of these instances are what is known as "swatting." "Swatting" is a growing problem for schools across the country in which prank calls are made in order to create chaos and panic.

### **Why Illini Central, and why two days in a row?**

Whether the events are connected or not, we do not know at this time. We know that there are people in the world who are intent on causing chaos and trying to disrupt the norm. The Mason City Police Department, specifically Chief Anderson, has been working with the state and federal authorities and other organizations to determine the origin of these calls. Evidence indicates that the calls were made from Florida and California. Currently, law enforcement is investigating and pursuing charges against those responsible. There is no evidence that there is a connection to anyone locally.

In 2019, there were over 1000 "swatting" incidents, according to the Anti-Defamation League. The Educators School Safety Network reported a 500% increase in false reports over a 5-year period from 2018-2023. While this does not explain why Illini Central was the target of swatting two days in a row, it does show that this is a growing problem across the nation.

### **What is Illini Central doing to prevent this?**

While we cannot control when and if a threat is made, we can control how we respond. The administration takes every threat seriously. Multiple staff members have been trained in Behavioral Threat Assessments, and we include the police in all threat assessments. All of the Mason City Police Officers are trained as School Resource Officers, and Illini Central has an agreement with the Mason City Police Department to share information and resources at all times.

The district also has a Say Something report that allows anyone, at school or in the community, to make a report of any suspicious activity or concerning behavior. This is located on our website under "Quick Links." This report is then directly emailed to the administrators to begin

acting as necessary. We have a variety of mental health supports to protect our students, including, but not limited to, social work and counseling services. We also strive to make Illini Central a place where all students feel welcome and supported to ensure that school is a safe place.

Our administrators are trained in responding to threats and other crises, and we review our safety plan at a minimum annually. Additionally, all staff are trained on our Crisis Management Plan, and drills are practiced regularly. In the events of December 18th and 19th, we were very pleased with how well staff executed the procedures from our Crisis Management Plan.

### **Are my kids safe at school?**

Illini Central schools have a Crisis Management Plan that guides the response to situations. We frequently practice our responses to various emergency situations, including fire, severe weather, and intruder/active shooter. We evaluate our responses to these drills and continue to make adjustments to have the best possible responses. In addition, the exterior doors to all buildings are locked during the school day, our windows have ballistic film installed, and we monitor our security cameras throughout the day. Finally, we work closely with the Mason City Police Department to ensure we are as safe as we can be at all times.

### **How can I tell my kids they're safe at school when they're scared to return?**

We understand that the events from December 18th and 19th might be scary for students as they return to school tomorrow. If your child is anxious to return, listen to them and try to understand their perspective. Try to validate that it is normal to be anxious when worried about safety.

Reassure your child that there are many people at the school working together to ensure it is safe. Remind them about the things the school does to make sure they stay safe - locked doors, monitored playgrounds, security cameras, practiced drills, etc. Please remind your children that if they ever have concerns about themselves or others, they should report it to a school employee or through the Say Something report to ensure that everyone, including your child, is safe. When talking with your child, leave the door open for further conversations and follow-up, especially after the return to school.

We hope to never be in this situation again, yet it is important to know that the school has responded effectively to threats and that we have the ability to do so again. Everyone at Illini Central wants the school to be as safe as possible because we work here, and many employees have children who attend school here. We have a vested interest in safety, and we will continue to do everything possible to protect everyone in the building.

We look forward to seeing everyone back at school tomorrow. Please note that Thursday, January 4, 2024, will be dismissed at 3:00 pm.

Sincerely,

Mr. Mike Ward  
Superintendent

Dr. Jennifer Durbin  
Assistant Superintendent