

Rethinking and improving school safety

‘Are our schools safe?’ This is a question that administrators, teachers, parents, students and communities have asked themselves since Nov. 30 when we all watched in horror the scenes from Oxford High School in Michigan where the latest mass school shooting occurred.

Our hearts hurt for the Oxford community, and we asked ourselves, “what if this had been our school?” In a few days the news cycle will move on, but, unfortunately, the community of Oxford will not. They will be dealing with the scars from the shooting for decades to come, and the rest of us will take a deep breath and hope this will be the last school shooting.

Can these acts of violence be stopped? Absolutely, but to stop them, we must rethink school safety.

At Bemidji Area Schools we began rethinking school safety over the past three years. We

began by adopting the Safe and Sound Schools’ Comprehensive Approach to School Safety, known as the “Big 6” which include: mental and behavioral health; physical environment; culture, climate and community; operations and emergency management; physical health and wellness; and leadership, law and policy.

Physical Environment: We have added more layers of safety to our campuses. You may have noticed more cameras and buzzers at entrances. By adding these layers of protection, we are able to screen who comes into our schools. We have also updated parking lots so traffic flows safer around our buildings.

Operations and Emergency Management: We are extremely proud of what we have done over the past three years in this arena. We have worked with local law enforcement, first responders, the Minnesota School Safety Center, the U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Justice to make sure our Emergency Operation Plans are in line with “best practices.” Our EOP outlines our response to any crisis that could occur on school grounds.

We have done our best

to prepare for as many situations as possible. However, we cannot foresee every emergency situation that could arise. This is why we have adopted the Standard Response Protocol from the “I Love U Guys” Foundation.

The SRP is the “lexicon” of school safety and is how we will communicate during a crisis at school. There are five actions: Hold, Secure, Lockdown, Evacuate and Shelter. Each action has specific instructions that can build on each other.

Over the past months, we have trained staff and students on these actions and responses and have worked closely with law enforcement and first responders so they know our plans. We are now ready to roll them out to parents and the entire community by sending letters home in the next few weeks that will explain each action and what parents should do in each situation.

This program is used all over the United States and Canada. We are thrilled to announce that the Bemidji school district is one of the first schools in Minnesota to officially adopt it.

Mental and Behavioral Health: It is no secret

people are struggling mentally these days. Schools are no exception. One of the best ways we can help students is by recognizing when they are in crisis and taking action to help them.

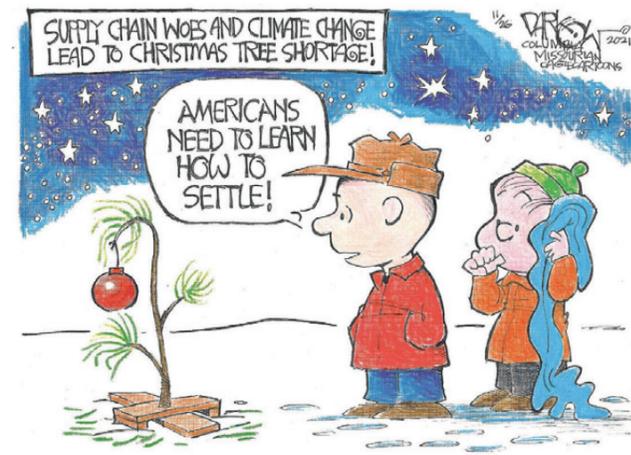
In Bemidji schools, we realize how important it is to support mental health and to help students in crisis, so we are working with several national organizations to develop an assessment plan for our schools. In the meantime, how can we help students cope? We can support and listen to them and, most importantly, “if you see something, say and do something.”

“Are our schools safe?” This is a question we take very seriously at Bemidji Area Schools and work to improve upon every day. We know if we want our students, staff and community to reach their full potential, we must take a comprehensive approach to school safety.

We cannot teach and learn if we are not safe, and our number one priority is safety for everyone in our schools. I am proud of what we have done and what we continue to do to keep Bemidji Area Schools safe.

Tim Lutz is superintendent of Bemidji Area Schools. He can be reached via email at tim_lutz@isd31.net.

CARTOONIST'S VIEW



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Thank you from the Community Holiday Meals Committee

The Bemidji Community Holiday Meals Committee would like to extend an enormous thank you to those who gave financially and the volunteers that helped in so many ways with the 41st annual Thanksgiving meal delivery.

Just under 300 hot meals were delivered with placemats decorated by Horace May Elementary students, along with a fun turkey joke folder that was created and colored by St. Philip’s students.

Thank you to the 25 drivers with their helpers, the Bemidji High School Honor Society students that joined 40 other volunteers for prep the day before, as well as the serving and loading of vehicles with the meals on Thanksgiving Day.

Special thanks goes to the Eagles Club and staff who welcomed our kitchen crew that has faithfully volunteered for many years.

Thank you to the Bemidji Pioneer for the initial publicity informing the public of meals and volunteer needs, and the subsequent coverage of the event on Thanksgiving morning.

If this volunteer driven program is near and dear to your heart, you enjoy organizing and seeing plans through to implementation, please consider joining the committee for the 42nd

annual Bemidji Community Holiday Meals in 2022. Another invitation will be issued next fall.

We do hope that next year we can be back to the normal delivery and sit down meals for both Thanksgiving and Christmas.

Just a reminder that there will be no Christmas meal or delivery this year.

Karen Ofetlie, Bemidji, is a member of the Community Holiday Meals Committee.

A colonoscopy may save your life

Thank you for printing the complete and accurate article “Scope or Sample? With colon screening some doctors differ” (published Dec. 15 on Page A7) about the recent Mayo clinic survey of primary care providers and their recommendations concerning colon cancer screening.

In reporting the various methods of screening we have available and with the volume of information, and disinformation, that is so easily available on TV commercials and social media, it might lead to the mistaken impression that all screening methods are created equal.

If 100 people with known colon cancer were stool tested for blood (FOBT, FIT tests) less than 30 of the cancers would actually be detected. Using the sDNA Cologuard test, greater than 95 of the cancers would be detected, a great improvement.

Unfortunately, none of the stool sample testing techniques are good for detecting the precursor to colon cancers: polyps. Greater than 90% of all colon cancers start as a polyp and polyps almost never cause any symptoms.

Part of the goal of colon cancer screening is to find polyps early and remove them before they turn into cancers, thereby preventing colon cancers from forming in the first place, not just detecting them after they have already turned into a cancer.

It is my impression that the general public, and unfortunately even many primary care providers nationwide, are unaware that the stool tests are poor screening tests for polyps. That is why, as reported in the article, physicians who specialize in gastrointestinal disease overwhelmingly recommend colonoscopy as the gold standard screening test. Colonoscopies allow the physician to not only perform an excellent screening, but also to remove any identified polyps before they have a chance to turn into a cancer.

Bottom line (pun intended): get your colonoscopy! If it’s normal, it gives you great peace of mind for up to 10 years. If it’s not normal, the colonoscopy may save your life.

Dr. Mark Claussen is a general surgeon at the Sanford Bemidji Medical Center.

From the Pioneer archives

10 years ago

December 18, 2011 — The Bemidji High School boys hockey team snapped out of an offensive funk by blasting Monticello 8-1. Matt Serratore scored two goals and the Jacks got one each from Dillon Eichstadt, Mike Sauer, Easton Halbert, James Bofferding, John Forseth and Tyler Tatro. Bemidji had scored only five goals in its previous four games.

25 years ago

December 18, 1996 — Navy Petty Officer 3rd Class Matthew R. Shough, son of Mark and Patricia Shough of Bemidji, recently received the Navy Good Conduct Medal, which recognizes honest and faithful service during a three-year period. He is currently assigned aboard a guided missile cruiser which returned from a deployment to the Persian Gulf.

50 years ago

December 18, 1971 — Four generations were together at a recent family gathering at the Ray Hamilton home in Wilton. They included little Justin Hamilton, his father Jerry Hamilton of Cudahy, Wis.; his grandfather Eugene Hamilton of Wilton and his great grandfather Ray Hamilton.

100 years ago

December 18, 1921 — A.E. Witting of Blackduck was elected president of the Beltrami County Farm Bureau at its annual meeting in Bemidji. Fifteen township directors were among the 40 attendees, who heard reports from county wool growers, seed potato growers, beekeepers and land clearing projects.

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