



School Board Office  
6 Schoolhouse Road  
Washington, Virginia 22747  
Telephone (540) 227-0023  
Fax (540) 987-8896  
[www.rappahannockschools.us](http://www.rappahannockschools.us)

**March 31, 2023**

## **Important Update**

Dear Rappahannock County School Family,

As you are aware, students and staff at Rappahannock County Elementary School experienced a “Shelter-in-Place” yesterday afternoon just before dismissal. The Shelter-in-Place was called in order to keep all students indoors, inside locked classrooms to allow the Sheriff’s office to investigate a loud bang that was heard in the distance behind the wooded area beyond the back of the school. A Shelter-in-Place is a protocol that is utilized in a non-imminent emergency to keep buildings and classrooms secure, students indoors and out of hallways, and resume normal classroom activities. This is not the same as a “Lockdown” in which classrooms are secured/barricaded and ALICE training is employed. In this instance, a Shelter-in-Place was called, but given the recent events throughout the country and nearby, some students may have experienced what felt more like a lockdown, which may have evoked a strong range of emotions. Additionally, some students were outside when the initial noise was heard and were rushed into the building as protocol requires. This may have added to the intensity for some students.

At 3:00 PM, an alert was sent to all RCES families using our emergency alert software, Swift Reach. We appreciate those who reached out to inform the school of a potential issue with the software’s release of the emergency alert which limited the number of families who received this message. As of this morning, the company has been contacted and has identified an internal issue that was preventing the message from getting out as designed. Swift Reach is resolving this issue and we will test the system to be sure further disruptions do not occur when sending emergency alerts. We have also put in our protocol to utilize multiple modalities of communication to ensure the broadest reach possible, even in non-emergency situations that require immediate response.

Also, the mental health innovators team remained on campus throughout the day to offer support to students and staff needing counseling or coping strategies. Our School Social Worker shared social emotional resources with teachers today to assist them in supporting students who were experiencing distress related to this event. Additionally, RCES had additional counselors available today to talk with students who needed reassurance. Should your child need additional help, you can call our student emotional support hotline at 540-683-0432.

As stated in the original email, we thank the Sheriff’s Office for an immediate response (under two minutes) to the scene and a thorough sweep that allowed the Shelter-in-Place to be lifted in approximately 10 minutes, and students to be released very close to normal departure time.

We thank our teachers and staff for their quick response in securing all students to allow for the Sheriff’s Office to do their work and call the “all clear.”

Finally, we thank our RCPS families for showing such grace, understanding, and cooperation during this event. We are using this incident as a test to our emergency protocols and an opportunity to further strengthen our training and procedures. Thank you for your assistance in keeping our schools safe. We are Rappahannock.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Shannon Grimsley". The signature is fluid and cursive, written over a light blue horizontal line.

Dr. Shannon Grimsley  
Superintendent / Cheerleader in Chief