

NSPRA Sample Letter to Parents — Safety Reminder and Hoax Response Alert re: Anthrax

Adapted from information prepared by NSPRA Southwest Vice President Judi Willis, APR, community relations director for Mesa (Ariz.) Public Schools and the Mesa Fire Department.

Dear Parents and Guardians:

Following the anthrax incidents in Florida, New York and Nevada, there has been a rash of anthrax hoaxes nationally. The chance of actually encountering anthrax is statistically minute. However, the number of hoax events is increasing and may be experienced by our schools as well.

We are asking all parents and responsible students to help eliminate the possibility of disruptions at school due to hoax incidents. Students and staff must feel safe at school. It also is imperative that we all protect the educational environment.

Our pledge to you is that we will take threats of any kind to our schools seriously, and will involve law enforcement agencies in the investigation. In all cases, we will ask law enforcement officials to help us evaluate the validity of the threat. We will also ask law enforcement and the courts to prosecute anyone responsible for making a threat or perpetrating a hoax, adult or student, to the fullest extent possible under the law.

We ask your support in the following ways:

- Talk frequently with your children about what they are hearing and seeing on the news, at school or in the neighborhood.
- Discuss with them the seriousness of playing a prank, teasing or spreading rumors.
- Encourage them to report any suspicious activity to a trusted adult at school, or to you. You may call your school administration directly or call the district's Silent Witness hotline at (*your district's number*).

We are doing everything possible to protect the health of our students and staff. We have reviewed the new Postal Service guidelines for handling suspicious mail with all staff members and have established safety procedures in the event any of our schools receive suspicious mail.

This is a very trying time for our community and our nation. Our public safety agencies (police, fire and emergency response) are taking all threats very seriously while attempting to minimize their impact on the public at large. The perpetrators of hoaxes live for the media frenzy they create. Every effort will be made by local officials to professionally handle these incidents without giving the perpetrators the attention they seek.

We appreciate your continued support of a safe learning environment for students.

Sincerely,

Superintendent