



TOWN OF STRATFORD

News Release

For Immediate Release
January 22, 2013

Stratford, Connecticut – Increased police presence, school facility updates, and enhancements in emergency communication have highlighted the days in Stratford since the December 14, 2012 tragic school shooting in Newtown, Connecticut.

“It’s been a very busy and productive time here in Stratford,” said Mayor John A. Harkins, who has joined Interim Superintendent of Schools Margaret Lasek and Police Chief Patrick Ridenhour at numerous local school safety forums since December 14th. The Board of Education and Central Office Administration organized the forums to explain school security measures that are already in place, outline new measures being implemented, and address questions and concerns from parents.

“Our goal is to ensure that Stratford students receive the best education possible in a safe and secure learning environment,” Mayor Harkins added. “Every option is on the table right now – every suggestion is being heard and carefully considered.”

Since accepting the position of Interim Superintendent, Lasek has consistently identified “the safety and security of our students and staff as the number one priority in our district.” Lasek ascended to the Interim Superintendent’s position with 40 years of experience as an educator and school administrator in Stratford.

Lasek noted that the school district is being served by an upgraded emergency notification system, which was installed after the Newtown tragedy. By early or mid February, Lasek said the system will be ready for both district and school-specific use.

“Our emergency alert system will facilitate the updating of our parents’ emergency contact information while enhancing the reach and speed of our emergency communications,” said Gavin Forrester III, Chairman of the Board of Education.

“While this is just one tool, the community can be assured that we are taking every step possible to protect Stratford’s 7,320 students and 842

employees – which includes teachers, certified instructional assistants, nurses, office staff and custodians,” Forrester noted.

The Board of Education Chairman, Interim Superintendent and other high-level administrators serve on a School Security Task Force that Mayor Harkins convened. The Task Force includes Emergency Management Director Anthony Schirillo, Fire Chief Robert McGrath, Fire Marshall Brian Lampart, Police Chief Ridenhour, Deputy Chief Joseph McNeil, Public Works Director Maurice McCarthy, EMS Director Phil Onofrio and other staff key staff members.

The Mayor’s Task Force augments and adds resources to the school and district safety committees, which were already in place.

Since December 14th in Stratford, every school has conducted Safety Committee meetings. Entry procedures have been revised and tightened. Emergency drills have been conducted frequently throughout the district. Police have increased their presence at all schools. Also, with the assistance of public works personnel, physical enhancements have been made at school facilities. So called “panic buttons” to link schools with the Police Department, increased video monitoring, and security guards at every school all are under serious discussion. And both school staff and the communities surrounding the schools have increased their vigilance.

Chief Ridenhour noted that it was a vigilant resident on January 8th who alerted police to four men with firearms entering the woods near Wooster School.

“Our officers were at the scene within two minutes and resolved the situation without incident,” Chief Ridenhour said, referring to the apprehension and arrest of four men who were shooting pellet guns in the woods.

The Chief reminded residents that it is illegal in the Town of Stratford to possess or use such pellet guns. It is also illegal to store, sell or offer such weapons. “We take this law very seriously,” Chief Ridenhour said, “particularly in light of recent events.”

Mayor Harkins noted that “while the primary impact of the Newtown shooting of course was suffered by the school staff and families there, that horrific event will cause lasting changes in communities across the country. We are all completely committed to making any and every adjustment that will keep our children and our community safe.”

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