

CONNECTICUT STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Hartford, Connecticut

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Circular Letter: C-9

TO: Superintendent of Schools
FROM: Theodore S. Sergi, Commissioner of Education
SUBJECT: Continuing Efforts in Aftermath of September 11th
DATE: September 26, 2001

THANK YOU

On September 11, 2001, all of Connecticut's 569,000 public school students were delivered home safely from your respective schools. Governor Rowland has asked me to thank Connecticut's educators for that effort, and for all that has taken place since. The reports of so many good, helping and supportive actions in our schools are heartening, and should be a source of pride for each of you.

As the weeks progress and while the nation struggles to find a way to stabilize and move on, our focus has to be on the education of children. As I said on September 12, our major message to students has to be that they are safe in their homes and schools, that they can talk about these events, get whatever help is needed and that we will get better. In addition, we should talk about these events in a way that separates fact from opinion. We hope that we as a nation will act in ways that move us to a better time and a safer world.

We have been advised consistently to preserve as much of the normal routine as possible—a stabilizing signal to children—and to continue to be calm, honest and compassionate with our students and staff. Most experts recommend that we not try to shield children from the truth in times of tragedy or disaster. We should give students time to ask questions and express their concerns and find perspective in an age-appropriate way.

We should make it clear to students and staff that if they believe they need help, we can provide it. In the next few days, we will be making small federal grants available to defray extraordinary costs for counseling and other services in those schools and districts most affected by the World Trade Center collapse. (See attachment).

PROTECTING OUR STUDENTS AND STAFF

We must continue to strive to be a community free of harassment, prejudice, and discrimination toward innocent people. President Bush, Governor Rowland and Secretary of Education Paige have all spoken eloquently about our responsibility as Americans to uphold our traditions of understanding and fairness and about the important theme of not harming but helping others.

In his Speech before Congress Thursday (9/20), **President Bush** said:

“Americans are asking: What is expected of us? I ask you to live your lives, and hug your children. I know many citizens have fears tonight, and I ask you to be calm and resolute, even in the face of a continuing threat.”

“I ask you to uphold the values of America, and remember why so many have come here. We are in a fight for our principles, and our first responsibility is to live by them. No one should be singled out for unfair treatment or unkind words because of their ethnic background or religious faith...”

In his remarks on September 14, **Governor Rowland** said:

“... if one result of this horrible tragedy is that each of us pledges to fight against evil, to stand in ways large and small against hatred and intolerance...and to live as a community, then the terrorists will not have won...”

“That is the spirit of America that must rise from this disaster. That is the best way to honor the friends, the families, and loved ones that have been lost. Then, the irony of these acts of cowardice will be that as a people,

we became stronger, not weaker... that we became kinder, not harsher... and that we became more sensitive to each other, that we learned even more, to trust, to love, to honor, and to help.”

The great acts of kindness, compassion, generosity and unity that we are seeing are examples of the character we hope to develop in every student. I encourage you to continue to use these real examples in your character education programs.

Families, schools, and our various religious faiths all help to teach right from wrong. These institutions also help people to understand the need for finding balance in making decisions about security versus freedom, and the difficult choices we face in seeking justice.

Section 10-15c of the Connecticut General Statutes prohibits discrimination in our schools based on race, color, sex, religion or national origin, and sexual orientation. All students, without exception, have the right to come to school, feel safe and grow to be productive and contributing citizens. Discrimination includes teasing, taunting, harassing, bullying, name-calling, physical violence, exclusion from curricular or extra-curricular activities and anything that harms a student or staffmember. I ask that you reinforce with your staff the moral and legal obligations we all share.

Secretary of Education Rod Paige has issued a statement addressing the issue of harassment of Arab-American and Muslim students or those of Middle Eastern or South Asian origin as excerpted from his letter to school officials nationwide:

“Through our words and the example of our own conduct, we must remind our children that harassment of and violence toward any individual because of his or her race or national origin is never acceptable. In addition, we must emphasize during this difficult time in our nation's history that our feelings of anger and sadness must not be directed at innocent Arab Americans, or other individuals having no connection to last week's events. Working together, we can make sure that our children get a good education in a safe environment that does not tolerate violence and hatred...”

There have been a few reported instances of harassment in Connecticut, and one hurt child or adult is too much; it is wrong and must not be tolerated in our schools.

WHAT'S NEXT?

- We are working with CAPSS to develop an emergency notification system—via the Internet—that could provide you instant notice of a message from the Governor or State Police.
- I encourage you to review your security policies and procedures and your crisis response and intervention services.
- The State of Connecticut Web Site <http://www.state.ct.us> and the State Department of Education Web Site <http://www.state.ct.us/sde> have information that may be of assistance to you.
- Also enclosed are additional informational materials about counseling initiatives.
- As local policies, practices, or curriculum become available, we will post them on our “Promising Practices” web site.

Your leadership during these difficult times has been exemplary; and as our nation struggles, it is reassuring to know that in Connecticut—our schools, staff and students are in good hands.

I am attaching a copy of Governor Rowland’s remarks of September 14. I hope that you find them helpful.

My best wishes in the days ahead. Thank you.

Enclosures: Remarks by Governor Rowland, September 14, 2001
 “Helping the School Community Respond to a National Crisis”
 “Schools Struggle With What to Tell Students About a Day of Terror”

CC: School Principals