

## Letter to the Team #12

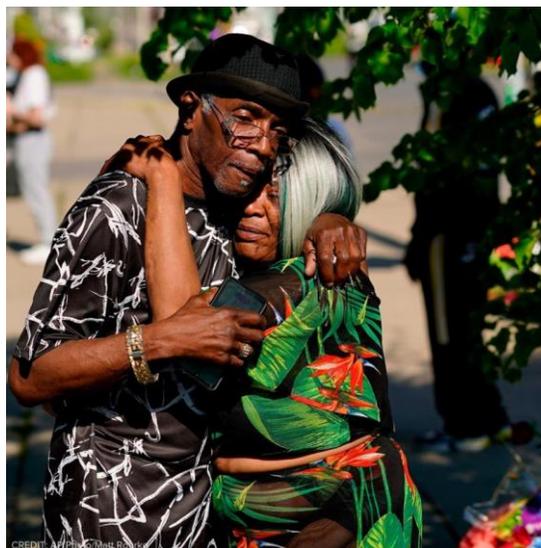
Members of the Bangor School Department community, I wish to share my thoughts on a personal and somber note. At a time of year we should be celebrating graduations and looking toward warmer days and a healthier future, I felt it necessary to reach out to each and every one of you. You sought out a career with great responsibility: inspiring learning in children. You continue this mission while providing stability and safety for those children and their families while we continue to navigate a global pandemic. Today, we continue to strive for these goals while the world feels overwhelming and scary.



CREDIT: AP Photo/Matt Rourke

A mere two weeks ago, I was profoundly saddened to learn of yet another act of violence, in this case, domestic terrorism, committed against Black Americans. As residents of Buffalo, New York, worked and shopped in their community grocery store, they experienced a horrifying act of violence. In a matter of minutes, an 18-year old self-proclaimed white supremacist killed 10 community members and injured three others. Their community will forever feel the impact of this atrocity. When this tragic event took place in Buffalo, I immediately thought of the fact that families will forever be impacted. On a personal note I reflected upon my own mother of whom we celebrated her 90th birthday in March. I thought of the family

in Buffalo who lost the matriarch of their family and wondered about the fairness of how my Mom can walk through the supermarket in her community without fear of death by gunfire.



CREDIT: AP Photo/Chris Wedel

This week, I was horrified to follow coverage of yet another school shooting—this time at Robb Elementary School of Uvalde, Texas. Like you, my heart was shattered to learn of the 19 students and two teachers murdered by an 18-year-old gunman who barricaded himself within their classroom. Dozens of families are grieving simply because they sent their children to school. Robb Elementary School has a free and reduced lunch program rate of 84%. I couldn't help but think of some of our schools with a similar or even higher free and reduced student lunch rate.



I imagine many of you thought of your own children and grandchildren as Jodi and I did while watching endless media reports from Uvalde. My first-year experience in the Bangor School Department brings me great joy every day as I have the privilege to work with over 3000 students who all possess a unique talent or a gift.

To be transparently candid, the incidents in Buffalo and Uvalde have brought me to tears as I can't shake my core belief that this is simply and profoundly not the way things should be. I am not sure what can create a sense of comfort during times like this. One thing I know is that if I can help a student, faculty, or staff member, unconditionally and under any circumstance, I would do so without hesitation. Interestingly I have thought of the significant adults in each building and I can vividly picture them as heroes who would put their own lives on the line for our children every single time.

School should be a safe place for children to learn and teachers to teach. Grocery stores should be safe. Houses of worship should be safe. These pillars within every community provide stability and care—particularly during the pandemic—yet we are now faced with navigating impossible thoughts and heartbreaking conversations with our children who look towards everyday buildings with unspeakable fears.

While much can be said about these acts of violence, I am reminded of one simple fact: our students are listening. As the communities of Buffalo, Uvalde, and countless others impacted by violence face difficult days, I wish to offer small ways that we can seek comfort and knowledge for ourselves and those who look toward us for answers. As Superintendent of Schools, I wish to share proactive steps we have and will take to make the Bangor School Department as safe as possible:

- As a prevention tool and support for students in distress, we will continue to infuse trauma-informed practices, increased mental health services, and educating ourselves on how to recognize and report warning signs into everyday practice.
- These acts of violence serve as an all-too-common reminder that teaching tolerance, celebrating diverse identities, and creating a climate that is safe for all students is what

*must* center our mission within the Bangor School Department. We will continue to take proactive steps to ensure Bangor welcomes diverse students and families with cultural competency and the demonstrated values of equity and inclusion.

- I continue to have ongoing conversations with the Bangor Police Department surrounding school and community safety. I thank Chief Hathaway and the Bangor Police Department for the increased presence in our schools and commitment to collaboration during this hard time.
- We will continue to implement multiple communication strategies to keep staff, students, and their families in contact surrounding important safety and health information.

I begin each day with the goal of making sure that our schools are a place where safety, tolerance, and respect flow freely. As always, I thank you for the hard work you do every day to ensure every member of the Bangor School Department community feels celebrated and safe.

Enthusiastically yours,



James Tager  
Superintendent of Schools  
Bangor School Department