"When I was a boy and I would see scary things in the news, my mother would say to me, 'Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping.' To this day, especially in times of disaster, I remember my mother's words and I am always comforted by realizing that there are still so many helpers - so many caring people in this world.”  - Fred Rogers

Dear Pine Crest Families,

The tragedy at Sandy Hook Elementary has caused all of us to reflect. This devastating incident has thrown us into a whirlwind of emotion and given us a new lens through which we see our school day, how we work, and how we learn.

Your response to my Friday letter has been overwhelming. Thank you for your comforting words and ideas for reaching out to Newtown, Connecticut. Thank you for your spirit of community. I have read each and every one of your emails, and I have spoken with some of you on the phone. Many of you have shared that you are having very straightforward discussions with your children about Sandy Hook, while some of you have decided not to discuss it with your children at all. Please know that all inquiries made by the children to us about the incident are being referred back to you. We want to respect your decisions regarding the best way to handle this for your family. Our role is to be the “helpers” described by Fred Rogers. We are here to guide our students through this troubling time by demonstrating consistency, stability, kindness, and compassion. Please click here to view a link provided by our counseling professionals outlining measures to help our students through this process of coping and understanding.

The Sandy Hook tragedy raises many questions about security at schools. I am proud to tell you that we have an extensive crisis management and security plan in place at Pine Crest. We have a strong partnership with local law enforcement agencies. In fact, the Fort Lauderdale Police Department has run practice maneuvers on the Fort Lauderdale campus. (When school was out of session, of course.) Our local police officers know us, know the layout of our campuses, and are at the ready to protect us. Also, like most schools across the country, we have added extra security for this week, both on and around our campuses.

I can assure you our security, faculty, and staff will do everything in our power to maintain the safety and security of our children. However, we all play a role in maintaining a safe and secure school environment for our children. Please remember that although security is always present at school, our campuses are “open” due to sporting and other activities before 8 a.m. and after 3 p.m. on the Fort Lauderdale campus, and before 8:15 a.m. and after 2:35 p.m. on the Boca Raton
campus. I have asked our faculty and staff to be aware, ask questions, and call security if they believe something is out of the ordinary. We ask you to do the same. Trust your instincts.

I would also like to share with you a few security modifications that will take place during the winter break. When you return you will notice that check-ins with identification will be mandatory at the guardhouse on the Boca Raton campus. There will be no entry via card access, except for faculty and staff. We are also reviewing our policy regarding the issuance of ID cards to parents and other volunteers to insure that we are in compliance with best security practices for schools. On the Fort Lauderdale campus you will notice that a new fencing and gating project is underway, including a modification to the stairwell at the parking garage. All of these measures had been planned prior to the Sandy Hook tragedy, but their importance is all the more apparent now.

I cannot close this letter without saying a few words about the extraordinary bravery of the teachers and administrators at Sandy Hook Elementary. Bravery is not on a teacher’s job description. Nor do we train for it on the job. Bravery wells up from a person’s soul, like a calling. It is the instinct to protect at any cost. Those educators were “all in” for their kids. I am so very proud to be in the same profession as the six women at Sandy Hook who gave their lives to protect children.

There is no doubt that this tragedy casts a shadow over all of our holidays this year. Yet it also reminds us of the importance of celebrations, and cherishing the love of family and friends. It is with that thought in mind I wish you holidays filled with hope, joy, love, and peace.

With warmest regards,

Dana Markham, Ed.D.
President