

April 14, 2025

Statement by the Executive Director of the Delaware Charter Schools Network, Kendall Massett

This was an emergency — but it did not become a tragedy because of trained professionals.

Last Thursday's incident at ASPIRA Charter High School (ACHS) – one of our dual language charter schools in Delaware – was a difficult moment for their school community when a firearm was accidentally discharged by a staff member. The individual involved in the accidental discharge was *not* a constable or a school resource officer (SRO). ACHS, like all schools, follows the law and policy that only police officers or constables are allowed to carry firearms on campus.

We are incredibly grateful that no students were hurt, and the one staff member injured received the medical assistance they needed.

In moments like this, it's natural to ask, "how did this happen?" or "what went wrong?" But it's just as important to focus on what went right—and to lift up the people and preparation that kept students and staff safe. This was a moment where we saw the best of what preparation, training, and community can look like in a crisis. The on-site constable, a retired New Castle County police officer, with emergency response training, acted at once and provided life-saving medical care to the injured employee. The constable's quick response quite literally saved this employee's life.

This was an emergency — but because of a trained professional, it did not become a tragedy.

That action, combined with the calm and steady leadership of the school staff, allowed students to be safely moved to classrooms, held and protected while safety was restored. This is exactly why schools have emergency protocols and practice them — to respond with clarity and care when the unthinkable happens.

Unfortunately, over the last decade or so, schools have had to create comprehensive crisis response plans to deal with any number of scenarios. Included in these plans is a process to reunite students with their parents. ASPIRA's reunification process was well-executed, efficient, and effective. As executive director of the network of Delaware's charter schools, it fills me with pride to share that ASPIRA was the first charter school in Delaware to conduct a full-scale reunification exercise in the summer of 2023—and their responses is a model of what thoughtful preparation can look like in a crisis.

When I visited the school on Friday, what I saw was clear — ACHS is a family. The culture and climate of the school are rooted in love, community, and care — and that foundation is what carried them through last week and will continue to sustain them as they move forward.

It reminds me of the words of Mister Rogers — *“Whenever there would be any real catastrophe — either in the movies or on the air — my mother would say, ‘Always look for the helpers; there will always be helpers, even on the sidelines. Because if you look for the helpers, you’ll know that there’s help.’”*

On Thursday, the helpers stepped up. The ACHS community stepped up. And we are grateful and proud.

And while we talk about safety and emergency response, we also have to remember what Mister Rogers said children need the most from us as adults: “What children probably need to hear most about us adults is that they can talk to us about anything and that we will do all we can to keep them safe in any scary time.”

That’s our job — every single day.

As we turn toward healing, we know there is still hard work ahead. Traumatic events like this have lasting effects — for students, for staff, for families. We will continue working with ASPIRA Charter High School and their partners to make sure resources are available for anyone who needs them — mental health support, victim services, and spaces for students and families to grieve, heal, and move forward together.

The investigation is still ongoing. But what I’m choosing to focus on are the positive aspects of what I know happened on Thursday—people doing their absolute best to protect and care for students in an unthinkable moment—and the resilience, love and community I saw on Friday that will carry this school forward.

That's what community looks like. That's what preparation makes possible. And that's what we will continue to support moving forward.

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If you would like more information about this topic, please contact Kendall Massett at KendallIM@DECharterNetwork.org.