



Nassau County Police Commissioner Patrick Ryder talks about school security efforts outside Mineola Middle School on Friday. ■ Video: [newsday.com/education](https://www.newsday.com/education)

School safety upgraded

New security initiatives launch academic year

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Students returning to schools in Nassau County next week will see an increased police presence in their buildings throughout the academic year, and security experts will work behind the scenes to ensure safety for the thousands of children in those classrooms, county officials said Friday.

"We are all working as hard as we can, and I have full confidence in our cops and in our law enforcement to keep our kids safe — before anything happens," Nassau County Executive Laura Curran said at a news conference outside Mineola Middle School.

She was joined by Police Commissioner Patrick Ryder, municipal village chiefs and Mineola schools Superintendent Michael Nagler, who also is president of the Nassau County Council of School Superintendents.

Most students and staff in Long Island's 124 public districts, as well as private and parochial schools, return to classrooms next week. Roughly 200,000 students will be in schools in Nassau County this fall. Jericho students started Wednesday.

Ryder said the Rave emergency alert system will be up and running by the second week of September in all public schools and also is being installed in private and parochial schools in Nassau. The digital panic button system provides an early notification to the police department and is a direct line from a school building to law enforcement.

Friday's announcement was the latest in a series of developments centered on heightening school security since mass school shootings in Parkland, Florida, in February and Santa Fe, Texas, in May.

Throughout the summer, districts across Long Island have strengthened entryways, changed protocols for visitors and added surveillance cameras. Some school systems have hired armed guards.

Friday, Ryder said all public

school principals in the county have received training in active shooter drills. He said he is meeting with officials from religious and private schools in Nassau to offer similar training.

Police officers will visit school buildings throughout the county over the next week and will make unannounced visits during the school year, Ryder said.

"When the doors open, every single able body in the Nassau County Police Department will be out from behind the desk and in the buildings and out at our schools, including myself, and visiting throughout the week to let the families know that our message is clear: Safety for our children is our No. 1 priority," the commissioner said.

James McDermott, president of the Nassau County Police Benevolent Association, said later Friday that the group had received an order from the commissioner two days ago requiring police officers to visit schools unannounced during their shifts.

McDermott said while school security is a top priority, there are challenges to that plan. The county lacks

crossing guards at a number of streets and police officers often fill in during the day. Officers also are assigned to answer service calls, and if an arrest is made early in an officer's shift, he or she will be unable to make a school building visit that day.

He advocates for School Resource Officers posted in the schools. Only the Uniondale district in the First Precinct has such an officer.

"The police commissioner was talking about response time, and what is a better response time than having someone in the school?" McDermott said.

He noted that the PBA has sent a letter to Ryder advising him of the group's concerns.

Officials Friday also announced a school safety forum to be held Sept. 25 at Hofstra University. Experts at the forum, presented by the county and the police department, will address such topics as active shooters, cyberbullying and opioid abuse.

Police have visited every Nassau County school and "hardened their security," Ryder said.

Nagler, the superintendent, said the relationship between

police and school officials has strengthened.

"Our No. 1 priority all the time is the safety of children in schools, and it is a comfort to know we have a great partnership with all of our police departments," Nagler said.

Melissa Connolly, 13, who is going to be a freshman at Mineola High School, was riding her bicycle with her sister, Megan, in Mineola on Friday. She said she feels safe in her school. "I feel that they are making sure everything is up to date," she said.

Two weeks ago, Suffolk County Police Commissioner Geraldine Hart said that more officers will patrol school campuses there, and Suffolk County Executive Steve Belone in July signed legislation authorizing the county to borrow \$2 million for the Rave system.

Earlier this week, the Suffolk County School Superintendents Association released its new action plan focused on enhancing school safety. That organization includes the chief school administrators of the 71 school districts and educational agencies in the county.