

Ensuring Student Safety at Seattle Public Schools

Introduction

Recent incidents have heightened concerns for the safety of our students, both at school and in the community. Seattle Public Schools (SPS) has a zero tolerance policy for violence done to — or by — our students. The bottom line is that all of our children deserve to be safe. Seattle Public Schools continues to seek new ways ensure that safety. Creating a learning environment that is safe and secure for all students is our number one priority.

While Seattle Public Schools is working to ensure that students are safe at school, the issue goes beyond school property. In fact, students have told us that they feel safe while at school, but not when they leave. Many of the recent problems have occurred off of school grounds. Events often involve youth who are not enrolled in school.

We ask that parents, students and the community join us in our efforts to promote a safe community. We are working closely with the Seattle Police department, the Parks department, Metro, parent organizations, and our valued community partners to take proactive preventive steps to keep our young people safe.

Below are answers to some of the most frequent questions on student safety. If you have specific concerns or questions, please contact the principal at your child's school.

What is Seattle Public Schools doing to ensure that students are safe?

Seattle Public Schools puts a high priority on the safety of students. This year, our Safety and Security Department has re-organized to provide more support services to schools. A new Safety and Security Manager has added six new Division Tactical Specialists to work with schools to enhance security support and supervision. Two additional Tactical Specialists work with at-risk and youth involved in gangs.

Our staff members continue to work with students to educate them about what they can do to increase their personal safety. We are working hard to emphasize the importance of reporting incidents or potential incidents.

The Safety and Security Department has been awarded a \$500,000 grant from the Department of Education to focus on readiness and emergency response for school safety. This funding will provide additional training, equipment and support to schools.

What is Seattle Public Schools doing to improve safety and reduce violence?

Seattle Public Schools believes that support and intervention can help reduce violence among our students. We recently reorganized the central office and hired a new Director of Support, Prevention and Intervention (SPI). This department delivers

different academic programs and more coordinated intervention services for students who need alternative learning support.

Programs that are in place include:

- Bullying Prevention
- Drug/Alcohol Prevention Programs
- Positive Discipline Programs in 10 schools across the district.

Additional efforts are underway including:

Safety Net Hub/Interagency Restructure Project, which will put into place formal systems that would improve the referral process for students to re-entry and inter-agency programs, increase communication among stakeholders, and put in place district-wide supports for all student K-12 (Phase I, II). A timeline has been developed that includes training for teachers, staff, and administrators.

We are preparing to implement a Comprehensive Response to Intervention (RTI) model across Seattle Public Schools. This tiered approach works to better support ALL of the students across our district.

We have implemented academic and behavioral supports designed to help at-risk and special needs students.

Further development of the Functional Student Intervention or Problem Solving Teams will be a critical component of the Comprehensive Response to Intervention Model (RTI). These teams will further clarify the roles of all stakeholders (teachers, support, staff, administrators, parents, families, etc.) in assisting in development of student intervention plans. These comprehensive plans are developed with the intent of supporting students with academic and social-emotional needs. The student intervention plans will be developed with an emphasis on “fidelity of treatment” and collaboration between teachers and support staff in schools and central office. The Response to Intervention Model would focus on the Plan, Do, Study, Action framework.

We continue professional development/training for staff on critical incident management, crisis intervention and conflict de-escalation, anti-bullying, etc.

We are also actively working with the City of Seattle on the Youth Violence Prevention Initiatives.

SPS is discussing measures that will further secure our schools. We're currently working on completing updated safety audits, which include building access procedures, and surveillance and supervision procedures.

What policies have been made to protect against violent incidents?

Our School Board has passed anti-harassment and anti-gang or hate group policies. Related training, programs, and other resources are available district-wide to support our students.

SPS Schools has a zero tolerance policy for violence done to — or by — our students. All reported acts of violence will be investigated and those that are potentially criminal will be reported to law enforcement. The discipline of violent events will follow the sanctions identified in the Code of Prohibited Conduct per School Board policy, D 71.00

Many incidents involve people who aren't students. Can't Seattle Public Schools just keep them off the campus?

We've been working with the police department and the City Attorney to make our policies and procedures on trespassing stronger. At the November 12 School Board meeting a motion was introduced to revise Board policy F44.00, Unauthorized Persons on School Property. The revised version states that unauthorized persons on school property are considered trespassers. School property includes, but is not limited to school buildings, school grounds, school sports facilities, school buses and other premises being used for a school-sponsored event. The School Board will vote on the revised policy during the next Board meeting on Wednesday, December 3.

The revised Board policy will help to ensure we have better control of who can come onto our campus. Updating these policies let the police and judicial system better support us.

What about incidents that happen off school grounds and when students are coming to or leaving school?

We are working closely with the Seattle Police department, the Parks department, Metro, parent and family organizations, and our valued community partners to respond appropriately once an incident comes to our attention. Working together, we are taking proactive preventive steps to keep our young people safe.

Our Security, Prevention and Intervention Director serves on key committees focusing on the needs of at-risk youth, and collaborates with local agencies that support students and families. These include: Re-investing in Youth, House Bill 2722 African American Gap Team, state Department of Social and Human Services (DSHS), OSPI School Safety Advisory Council, Juvenile Justice Center, Seattle-King County Health Department, City Council, Mayor's Office, Seattle Alliance, Casey Family Program, and Youth Services.

We believe that keeping kids in school will help reduce violence. We're working with Re-Investing in Youth to get funding for a district-wide Drop Out Prevention Specialist. This position will work with other SPS staff on strategies to reduce the drop out rate.

It seems like there are more problems at Garfield High School this year since they came back to the remodeled school. Is Seattle Public Schools doing more there?

- When students returned to the larger, renovated Garfield campus this fall, we increased security from two specialists to three.
- We have installed surveillance cameras on campus.
- We are putting more emphasis on personal safety, particularly when coming to and going from school.
- Each month, we join staff from the Parks Department, Seattle Police Department for about security on the Garfield campus.
- Students are being encouraged to report incidents or potential incidents, and information about how to do so anonymously is being distributed.
- SPS has been in contact with the Seattle Police Department's East Precinct and the King County Sheriff's Office (responsible for Metro) about incidents involving students as they leave campus.

What can students do to increase their safety?

The Seattle Police Department has provided the following Personal Safety Tips:

Never before has so much information been available to people through so many different types of media. When so much of the news today is about crime, especially violent crime, it is hard not to fear for yourself and the safety of your loved ones.

While it is good to be cautious, it is also important to not be unreasonably frightened. Violent crime in Seattle is one of the lowest for cities its' size in the nation. And "Stranger Danger," one of the most frightening types of reports in the news, is actually one of the rarest types of crimes.

Unfortunately, there are no guarantees that you will never become a victim of violent crime, however, there are some basic, sensible and easy to follow safety precautions that can lessen your chances of this type of encounter.

PAY ATTENTION TO YOUR GUT INSTINCTS

All of the crime prevention techniques in the world are nothing compared to your own gut instincts. Your gut is often right — trusting your own instincts that a situation feels "wrong" can be the best personal safety tool you have.

People are often afraid to trust their instincts because it would be embarrassing to be wrong. Remember that a moment of embarrassment is far less important

than your overall safety. Don't ignore a situation that feels wrong just because in your mind it "looks okay."

GENERAL SAFETY TIPS

- Follow your intuition — trust your feelings. If you feel that a situation is not right, move out of the situation. Returning to school and finding an adult would be appropriate.
- Be aware of your surroundings. In social situations, be alert to places and situations that make you vulnerable.
- Walk with confidence and remain alert.
- Try to travel with other students on the way home or to the bus stops.
- Contact 911 if you are witness to a crime or if you are the victim of a crime. This also includes emergencies or criminal incidents on Metro Transit
- Call Seattle Public Schools Safety and Security Dept.: (206) 252-0707 (24 hours a day)
- Call Metro Transit Police for non-emergency dispatch: (206) 296-3311

Here are ways you can make reports without anyone identifying you:

- Anonymous Safe Schools Hotline: (206) 252-0510
- Anonymous Crime Stoppers Tip Line: 1-800-222-TIPS (8477) or (206) 343-2020
- Anonymous Crime Stoppers text message to Seattle Police Department: 1) Type "TIP486"; 2) Type your message; 3) Send text to "CRIMES" or "274637." When the text message is received, the sender will receive a confirmation number within 10 seconds or less confirming receipt of the information.

Parents, guardians, family members and others in the community can also use these reporting options.