



Safer Schools: SOMSD Combating Sexual Assault Task Force Update & Recommendations

September 2021

Members of the SOMSD Sexual Assault Taskforce

Dr. Ronald G. Taylor	Superintendent of Schools
Candice Davenport	Public Health Officer, Maplewood Health Department
Dr. Matthew Friedman	Asst., Superintendent, Curriculum & Instruction
Dr. Gretel Perez	Asst., Superintendent, Diversity & Equity, Title X Coordinator
Ann Bodnar	Director, K - 8 Curriculum & Instruction
Stacey Robinson	Director, Human Resources
Frank Sanchez	Principal, Columbia High School
Dara Gronau	Principal, Maplewood Middle School
Lynn Irby	Principal, South Orange Middle School
Julianne Porter	Nurse, South Mountain Annex; Lead Nurse SOMSD
Jenny Easton, LCSW	Social Worker, Columbia High School, Deputy Title IX Coordinator
Amy Pitucco	Social Worker
Alison Steiner	Social Worker
Caralyn Moore	Confidential Secretary, Office of the Superintendent
Adaliana Cuadrado	Confidential Secretary, Office of the Superintendent

SOMSD Sexual Task Force Background

On May 17, 2021 the South Orange and Maplewood School District Board of Education adopted Resolution 4149:

SOUTH ORANGE MAPLEWOOD BOARD OF EDUCATION RESOLUTION TASK FORCE TO PROTECT STUDENTS FROM SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND VIOLENCE

WHEREAS, The South Orange Maplewood School District is committed to equity, diversity and inclusivity, providing safe and welcoming spaces for all students, regardless of race, ethnicity, national origin, language, disability status, gender expression or identity, and sexual orientation; and

WHEREAS, The South Orange Maplewood Board of Education is in support of and is committed to ensuring inclusive, welcoming, safe school environments free from harassment and discrimination, including from unlawful sexual harassment and/or misconduct and all forms of violence, harassment, bullying and intimidation and in furtherance of the district's commitment to provide a climate and culture that fosters a welcoming, safe and healthy environment for all students to promote respect, dignity and equality; and

WHEREAS, Research shows that even though vast underreporting occurs, over 40% of middle and high school students are victims of sexual violence or sexual harassment; and

WHEREAS, Research indicates that educational institutions are the most common location of peer sexual victimization, and that sexual violence or sexual harassment have devastating effects on students which negatively impact their emotional and physical well-being; and

WHEREAS, Research shows that students who experience sexual violence and sexual harassment are more likely to withdraw from interests and activities, experience avoidance of school, finding it hard to pay attention in school and impacting academic outcomes. Research has also demonstrated that targets of sexual bullying and harassment experience anxiety, distress, loss of self-esteem, and depression; and

WHEREAS, The South Orange Maplewood Board of Education affirms its commitment that students should be able to go to school or participate in any school based sport or activity on or off campus without fear of sexual harassment, sexual or gender based violence, and to providing an environment free from sex-based discrimination and sexual harassment, including sexual and gender based violence, interpersonal violence and bullying, and also reaffirms its commitment to providing a hostile free educational environment; and

WHEREAS, The South Orange Maplewood Board of Education affirms its commitment that the Title IX Coordinator, staff, and students should be trained about healthy relationships, consent and what constitutes sexual assault, bystander intervention, where students can get counseling, medical help, and other services, and how to respond appropriately to reports of sexual assault; therefore

BE IT RESOLVED that the South Orange Maplewood Board of Education directs the Superintendent to identify

key stakeholders -- particularly students, parent/guardians, employees (teachers, Title IX coordinator, para-professional educators, special educators, administrators, coaches, and support staff), student groups, survivors of sexual misconduct, providers of victim support services (e.g., school counselors, nurses, social workers, and psychologists as well as local rape crisis and interpersonal violence centers) and those others whose expertise and input should be included; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the South Orange Maplewood Board of Education directs the Superintendent to convene a Task Force comprised of identified students, educators, key stakeholders, community organizations and health professionals and community members to identify resources, resource gaps, and barriers and to review and conduct an assessment of the District Code of Conduct, Board policies, District regulations, training protocols, implementation issues and procedures on sexual harassment and sexual and interpersonal violence, and teaching consent, evaluating overall health curriculum, identifying district protocols as well as preventative and support measures, and directs the Superintendent to present a report with the results of that assessment as well as recommendations to the Board no later than September, 2021.

Milestones/Meetings

- I. Upon receiving direction via Board Resolution 4149, Dr. Ronald G. Taylor Superintendent of Schools selected the members of the Task Force to address and combat sexual assault in the South Orange and Maplewood School District.
- II. The Task Force convened on the following dates (pertinent information from these meeting are shared in the **Resource** section below) -
 - A. Jun 4, 2021
 - B. Jun 21, 2021
 - C. Jul 21, 2021
 - D. Aug 18, 2021
 - E. Sep 17, 2021
- III. In conjunction with the launching of this Task Force, on May 17, 2021 the South Orange and Maplewood School District Board of Education also formally approved Dr. Gretel Perez, Assistant Superintendent for Access and Equity as the District's Title IX Coordinator. Recent changes in Federal Title IX compliance created synergy between the work of our Task Force and Dr. Perez's transition into the position of Title IX Coordinator. Understanding the importance of this work many of our Combating Sexual Assault Task Force Members are now participating in our Title IX Taskforce (Review Panel).

Title IX

After receiving the Board's approval of the Title IX assignment Dr. Perez began to review ancillary organizations that offered support for this essential work. After an arduous search the District has now engaged with Institutional Compliance Solutions (ICS). <https://icslawyer.com/>

In order to ensure our staff is proficient in the reporting of potential Title IX allegations, all staff were provided time to complete training on September 9, 2021 during the District-wide Professional Development Day. For certificated staff, the sessions were virtual and included a quiz on the content at the conclusion of the engagement. Non-certificated staff were provided with in-person training in September (these employees do not have accounts on Canvas to complete it virtually). <https://icslawyer.com/titleixu/> This "Responsible Employee Training" was provided to the District by ICS, which works with Pk-12 districts and higher education institutions nationwide to ensure they are handling Title IX situations appropriately. ICS will provide specific training to the members of the Title IX Taskforce (who also form part of the Sexual Assault Taskforce) during the school year. Lastly, ICS supported the drafting of the update to Policy 5751.

■ B. Policy 5751 Sexual Harassment - 1st read 9-20-21.pdf

(See screenshot below from the virtual training)

≡ TitleIX > Files > South Orange-Maplewood School District RE Training.mp4

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South Orange-Maplewood School District RE Training.mp4

Download South Orange-Maplewood School District RE Training.mp4 (333 MB)



The screenshot shows a virtual training slide with a blue background and yellow text. The title is 'Do NOT Investigate'. Below the title, there are two bullet points: 'Do not ask additional questions' and 'Title IX Coordinator will make determination as to whether conduct meets the definition of Sexual Harassment within an Education Program or Activity.' In the bottom right corner, there is a logo for 'K-12 ICS INSTITUTIONAL COMPLIANCE SOLUTIONS'. At the bottom of the slide, it says '©Institutional Compliance Solutions 2021 All Rights Reserved'.

◀ Previous

Taskforce Recommendations

Overarching Recommendation:

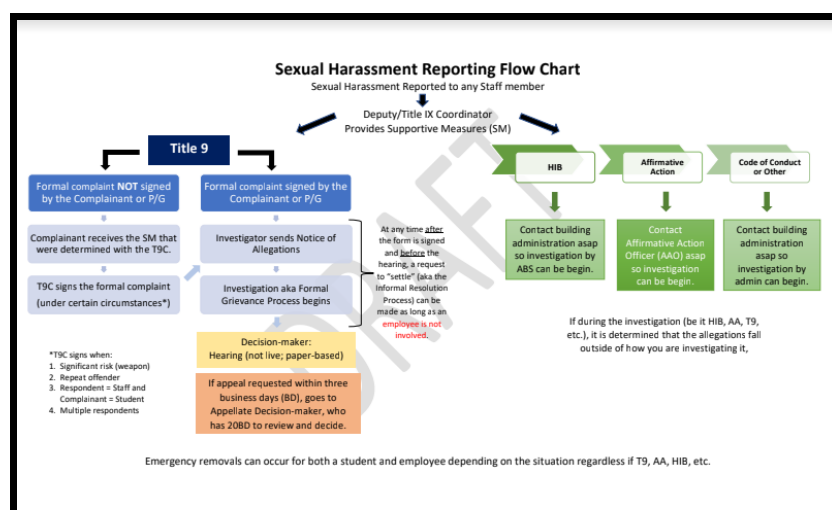
Coordinated District-wide effort for consistent implementation of expectations of staff for the protection of our students.

Specific Recommendations (Some already initiated for the 2021-2022 sy)

- I. Formal SOMSD Process & Protocols for Reporting
- II. Prevention efforts in our middle schools similar to the Consent Powerpoint in the Resources below. Originally it was presented by Columbia High School students to our middle school students. It was by all reports well received but was discontinued when the CHS students graduated.
- III. Reporting Options, Advocacy & Support Services
- IV. Training: Staff Professional Development/Training; Student workshops and training
- V. Curriculum & Instruction (C&I): Incorporating sexual assault education into K-12 Health Curriculum
 - A. SOMSD currently addresses sexual assault and healthy relationships in parts of our health curriculum:
 1. Grade 8 Unit - Dating & Relationships
 2. Grade 9 Unit - Relationships
 3. Grade 9 Unit - Consent
 4. Grade 12 Unit - Romantic Partnerships
 - B. The C&I department has identified a teacher who has focused on this work in other districts. He is working with other members of the Health and PE department to revise and edit the K-12 Health Curricula so that our content is continuously up to date. We are anticipating that this will be complete by the 2022-2023 school year.
- VI. Middle Schools- See #2 above
- VII. Columbia High School - Launched Healthy Relationship Task Force, continue this engagement
https://docs.google.com/document/d/1rGZHHd1Dmjv_E15Hwn3gGYUiTFqSQ9pUaS0jH004044/edit?usp=sharing
- VIII. More Partnership engagement with professionals who specialize in this important work...similar to the ONE LOVE organization that has had an ongoing partnership with Columbia High School.
<https://www.joinonelove.org/>
- IX. Continue to review usage and security of Underhill Field
- X. Now that students are returning to school, continue to engage them in these important discussions.

Resources

- SOMSD- Sexual Assault Information Session Presentation, Jenny Easton, LCSW, Social Worker @ Columbia High School Shared during the New Teacher Orientation in August- Updated to reflect the legal definitions of age of consent via the District's Solicitor
 - [Sexual Assault Power Point](#)
- Consent PPT Presentation (via Columbia High School Students for SOMSD Middle School Students) Nicole Ostrow & Sophia Alexander
 - [Consent Powerpoint](#)
- Columbia High School Sexual Assault Triage (Step by Step)-
 - [Sexual Assault Triage](#)
- Notes from Task Force Meetings-
 - [Sexual Task Force Meeting 2021.06.21](#)
 - [Combating Sexual Assault Task Force Meeting 2021.07.21](#)
 - [Sexual Task Force Meeting 2021.08.18](#)
 - [Sexual Task Force Meeting 2021.09.17](#)
- New **Draft** Title IX Sexual Harassment Reporting Flow Chart



- ["SAFER Choices" Assembly with Mike Domitrz](#)

"SAFER Choices" Assembly with Mike Domitrz | The Center for Respect

While many school presentations try to raise a student's awareness, Mike Domitrz's "SAFER Choices" School Assembly is focused on getting students to take positive actions...

