

FAQ on School Safety

Safety Procedures

What we do to ensure physical safety and security for all our students?

Keeping our students and staff safe is always the highest priority for the South Orange Maplewood School District. We are committed to making sure we are following best practices and implementing security measures in a way that is educationally and age appropriate.

- We coordinate our approach to school safety with the Police and Fire Departments of South Orange and Maplewood.
- Security procedures are established for all of the schools – schools are locked, cameras monitor all who enter our buildings, and each school has a crisis management team.
- We conduct regular security drills so that students and staff know what to do to protect themselves in various situations. Security drills include non-fire evacuations and lockdown situations. After each drill we closely monitor reactions and we evaluate our procedures to update our practices as necessary.
- We thoroughly review, evaluate, and update safety practices and security plans on a routine basis, including monthly internal meetings, communications with the police, input from security experts, and involvement in statewide programming.
- One of the most powerful security measures we have in place is the buy-in from staff and students with regard to informing us of suspicions and concerns. Continued awareness orientation and security drills are key to providing a safe and secure environment.

Procedures for visiting/entrance to schools

Procedures are in place for screening of visitors before admittance to schools. All visitors are asked to enter through the main doors and are granted entry by getting buzzed in. Protocol scripts have been shared with personnel who handle the admittance. We understand that some personnel will allow entrance when they recognize a person rather than asking for identification. Students and staff are informed that they should not be opening doors for visitors other than the staff allowing admittance through the main doors.

What is a Code Yellow and how/when is it triggered?

A Code Yellow is called when there is a concern requiring students to stay in place but it does not involve an armed person. An example of this could be a person who has been hurt and external medical attention is needed. A code yellow would keep people out of the way and allow emergency personnel to conduct their work without delay. Another example would be to lock students into the building but not into their rooms because of a potentially dangerous situation outside of the building – such as a report of a bear walking around outside of the building or the possibility of the pursuit of criminals reported in the area. In each case the students and staff would stay safely inside the building. Within the building, business (classes) would continue as usual. Both examples have happened in South Orange-Maplewood in the past year.

What is a Code Red and how/when is it implemented?

A Code Red is generally called when there is the threat or possibility of an Armed Intruder in the building. This is the most serious form of lockdown. In such a situation, the halls would be emptied and students, staff and visitors would be secured in locked rooms until released by the police.

There are additional types of drills that can be very slow in resolving. Two cases are bomb threat and hazardous vehicle accident. In one case – bomb threat - the building **MUST** be evacuated and searched. Police dogs are used for the search and these are not quickly available. With a hazardous vehicle accident in the proximity of the school, evacuation will be called for and return will be totally dependent on the ability of the police and fire departments to resolve the danger. In both cases, the students may have to be temporarily relocated. There are provisions for this in the plan.

How is a Code Yellow/Red communicated to staff and students? How does the school know that everyone has been alerted?

Announcements are made throughout the building and protocols are in place for immediate hallway checks.

Is there a way to reduce the length of time or stress related with staying in a Code Red even after the main source of the problem has been addressed?

A Code Red indicates a serious situation and clearing the building can take some time. This has been modified on occasions when the alarm is reported and verified as accidental. In a real situation, the release time may vary greatly depending on how quickly the threat is identified and neutralized. Some accommodations have been made between the police and staff on a case by case situation. Considering the potential danger to students it is not a benefit to anyone to standardize any accommodation.

There have been several accidental lockdowns in the last two years. This usually involves a mistake by an individual and this is not always recognizable at the time of the lockdown. When this has happened in the past years, it has taken 30 to 50 or more minutes to identify. The lockdown must remain in effect until this is identified as accidental.

In the case of a real lockdown, the staff and students may remain in their rooms for an hour or more. This is done with the full intent of SAFELY resolving the issue and for no other reason.

What are the protocols between SOMSD and Police Departments

In the event of an emergency, the police departments are the incident command and take control of the circumstance. School personnel are trained to respond to the police instructions. Drill procedures are reviewed with the police department and the police participate in code red drills during the year.

What are the chief day-to-day safety issues at the school?

The biggest issue from a security aspect is non-compliance with protocols especially in granting access to the building.

Supports for Students

What do we do to promote emotional safety and security for all our students?

Each building has multiple initiatives aimed at ensuring a positive school climate, including conflict resolution, anti-bullying, peer mentors, character education and counseling programs. The Guidance and Social Work departments have an open door policy. There is no stigma when students come to our offices for help. We also have graduate Social Work students doing internships in our schools each year and providing support to the entire school community.

What sorts of programs are in place to identify children at risk of demonstrating dangerous behavior?

Across the district, each school provides individual counseling and group counseling to students identified as needing this support either in their Individualized Education Plan or by a teacher, other staff member, or parent. There are Intervention and Referral Services committees in every school which identify students in need of additional support, academic and social/emotional. We also have intensive support programs at the middle school and high school levels which provide therapeutic services to at risk students who require significant support.

What identification/early intervention programs are presently in place?

We have a referral process to Intervention and Referral Services for students identified as possibly being at risk. When appropriate, school counselors attend IEP meetings, team meetings, as well as parent conferences to address individual student concerns. There is continual open communication between staff and guidance department.

Are parents and community members who have the trust of the at risk child being brought in to help address the problems the child is experiencing before the child feels the need to act out in such a potentially dangerous manner?

Those students identified as having emotional and behavioral needs have several parent meetings as well frequent email or personal phone contact during the year.

Does the mentoring program that works with at risk youth still exist and if so, does it work with middle school as well as high school aged youngsters?

We do have a student/teacher Mentee/Mentor program. It is one of the best ways to build supportive relationships.

How do we support students after an incident?

When a crisis does happen, we have experienced social workers, guidance counselors and student assistance counselors on staff who help us design an appropriate response to support students in processing what has happened. This can include a school-wide assembly, grade level assemblies, classroom meetings, or individual counseling. We have an employee assistance plan – CONCERN – which is available to support staff members. We also have wonderful resources within the community and outside experts who we consult with to make sure that our plans are well targeted and effective.

Discipline Policy

What is the discipline policy?

We have a district wide code of conduct which clearly delineates the expectations for students, and the consequences for different types of infractions.

Who handles day-to-day discipline at the schools?

The building principal has the primary authority to assign discipline to pupils.

What is the suspension/expulsion policy at the school?

Board Policy 5610 gives full detail on the District's policy on suspension.

"The Board of Education recognizes that even the temporary exclusion of a student from the educational program of this district is a severe sanction and one that cannot be imposed without due process.

Any student who is guilty of continued and willful disobedience, or of open defiance of the authority of any teacher or person having authority over him, or of the habitual use of profanity or of obscene language, or who shall cut, deface or otherwise injure any school property, shall be liable to punishment and to suspension or expulsion from school.

For the purposes of this policy, "suspension" means the temporary removal of a student from the regular instructional program.

How many times can one be suspended and continue to be returned to school? There is no set number of times – it depends on the individual situation including the severity of the incidents. There are no changes to this from last year.

If a student brings a weapon to school, will he or she ever be allowed to return?

It depends on the individual circumstances of the incident, including the past history of the child and the weapon involved.

Please explain the district's policy regarding students bringing firearms to school.

Board policy states that *"A student convicted or adjudicated delinquent for these firearm offenses shall be immediately removed from the school's general education program for a period of not less than one calendar year and placed in an alternate education program"*.

Will recent incidents regarding guns on school property prompt a re-evaluation of the district's policy?

"The Board annually reviews this Policy and Code of Conduct after considering the findings of the annual reports of pupil conduct, including suspensions and expulsions, pursuant to code, and the incidences reported under the Electronic Violence and Vandalism Reporting System, in accordance with code."

Can we have a "no tolerance" policy for violence?

No tolerance policies have generally proven to not be effective. We assess every individual case on its own merits.

Family/School Partnership

School safety is a 3-way partnership between the schools and district; law enforcement; and families and communities. We each have a vital role to play.

What can families do to promote school safety?

- Educate children about their role in helping keep their school safe.
- Encourage children to report any potentially dangerous or worrisome situations to teachers and administrators.
- Engage children in making healthy decisions about school and life.
- Educate children about the responsible use of social media, and encouraging awareness about how quickly rumors can spread and seem to become fact.
- Talk to children about the dangers of gun violence, and perhaps consider advocating locally and/or nationally for laws and policies that will prevent the flow of illegal weapons to our children and our communities.
- Partner and support schools with discipline; schools cannot do this alone.

What type of information can I expect during and after a lockdown or crisis?

When we know that there is an unexpected lockdown or potential safety threat, then the district will contact families by email and, if appropriate, by phone. The first message is likely to be very brief, just advising that there is a lockdown and that steps are being taken to ensure everyone's safety. Once the lockdown is lifted, either because the situation has been resolved, or because it was determined that there was not actually a safety threat, a second communication will be issued by the district. This message will inform you that the lockdown has been lifted, and give any other details which are available and able to be released at that time. These communications will come from Central Office, not from the school itself, since school personnel will be engaged in managing the lockdown, and then in returning the school to its normal operations.

What should I do if I hear that there is an issue going on at the school?

If you receive a message from the district that a lockdown is in effect, please allow school and law enforcement personnel to take the necessary steps to identify whether or not there is an actual threat, and to resolve the situation. Please do not come to the school to pick up your child. You will not be admitted to the building during a lockdown. Please also refrain from calling the school as personnel will not be able to respond to phone calls – their priority is to protect the safety of the students and staff, and to assist law enforcement.