

PLATTE CANYON SCHOOL DISTRICT
SCHOOL SAFETY

**A POSITION PAPER
AND
PRESENTATION OF FOCUS TARGETS
FOR
SAFETY PLANNING, IMPLEMENTATION AND MONITORING**

SUPERINTENDENT
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SAFETY OVERVIEW

Our District mission is to promote educational excellence in safe schools. It is our intent to fulfill this mission in the interests of our students, staff and community. While we have implemented numerous safety provisions in past years and have initiated additional provisions since September 27, 2006, we recognize that “school safety” requires a broadened scope of thinking and increased resources.

The Board and administration have received safety enhancement recommendations from the School Safety Advisory Task Committee (SSATC) and the Colorado State Patrol, Homeland Security Section, Rubicon Team (Rubicon) that conducted a vulnerability study of the District Complex, Platte Canyon High School and Fitzsimmons Middle School. Additionally, Board members and administrators have attended conferences on school safety and received information from school safety specialists and technicians. The October 2006 Colorado School Violence Prevention and Student Discipline Manual provided by the Attorney General of Colorado, John W. Suthers, has been very helpful.

Based upon the insights gleaned from these sources, it is clear that safety enhancements must include a wide range of safety considerations from weather-related hazards to day-to-day staff and student awareness of potential dangers to general school climate factors. In today’s world the elements to be addressed in school safety planning and resources required for school safety go far beyond those of past decades. It is with this expanded view of school safety that directions for safety planning are being established and resources allocated. While no public facility can be guaranteed to be “absolutely safe,” it is our duty to be informed about best safety practices and to translate these practices into realities for the safety of our students and staff, and for the preservation of our District’s physical assets.

TARGETS FOR ENHANCING SCHOOL SAFETY

We have identified ten targets that require focused attention for school safety in Platte Canyon:

1. MANAGE CAMPUS ACCESS
2. INCREASE SECURITY AND SAFETY PROVISIONS ON SCHOOL GROUNDS
3. CONTROL AND MONITOR ACCESS TO SCHOOL BUILDINGS
4. INCREASE OUR FOCUS ON A “POSITIVE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT”
5. ENHANCE STUDENT AND STAFF SAFETY AWARENESS AND FOSTER REPORTING
6. INCREASE STAFF/SECURITY/VOLUNTEER PRESENCE
7. CONDUCT ROUTINE FACILITY SAFETY INSPECTIONS
8. CONTINUE BUS SAFETY INSPECTIONS AND DRIVER TRAINING ON SAFE TRANSPORT PRACTICES
9. REFINE, THROUGH INTERAGENCY COOPERATION, OUR CRISIS MANAGEMENT PLANS AND PRACTICES
10. MONITOR SCHOOL SAFETY ANNUALLY

TARGET 1 - MANAGING CAMPUS ACCESS

As stated in the SSATC report, “managing campus access is a basic concept of creating a safe school climate.” Platte Canyon’s schools operate as campuses, not as single buildings where students enter and remain during the day. At Deer Creek Elementary School (DCES), students participate in activities in modular buildings not connected to the main facility, and they also have recess and physical education activities on the grounds at a considerable distance from the primary facility. Early Childhood Education and a Child Care Center provide services in modular buildings. Fitzsimmons Middle Schools (FMS) and Platte Canyon High School (PCHS) utilize not only their main facilities but also the District Complex. In addition, the campus is open to the public for swimming, to delivery vehicles, and to adults coming to the District Office. With U.S. Highway 285 adjacent to the main campus, travelers pull into the parking areas for a variety of reasons.

Rubicon highlighted concerns about open campus access. Such access increases opportunities for kidnapping, child predators, and random intrusions by disturbed and hostile individuals or terrorists. Open access at night and on weekends creates high vulnerability to vandalism and theft. While pedestrian access is hard to control, the terrain does limit vehicle access from most directions at each campus. To secure each site with costly fencing to deter individuals from walking on to campuses does not seem reasonable and would likely not significantly increase safety. On the other hand, managing vehicle access is deemed to have a potentially high safety impact.

Both Rubicon and security specialists have noted that reasonable measures to limit campus access while school is in session and during school activities can have a high safety impact and also minimize the need for stringent security measures at the entrances to each facility. When security at the campus perimeter becomes the first level of a total system, negative impacts on a positive learning and working environment can be reduced. We recognize that concerns have been expressed about gates and other perimeter security measures but believe that action must be taken to better manage campus access.

Completed Actions

- 1. Video Surveillance policy adopted– Policy 106, Article 12.**
- 2. Vulnerability study completed by Rubicon.**

Proposed Actions:

- 1. Monitor campus entrances through the use of surveillance cameras now being installed.**
- 2. Initiate a study of ways to manage campus access including the feasibility of gates, vehicle barriers, security stations at access points, vehicle holding areas, and vehicle turnaround.**

TARGET 2 - INCREASE SECURITY AND SAFETY PROVISIONS ON SCHOOL GROUNDS

School grounds are subject to ongoing safety issues for schools including accidents, bullying and assaults while students are engaged in unstructured play or “break activities.” Student drop-off and pick-up points, especially when buses and private vehicles are in the same lot, present significant hazards. Further, drivers, at times, fail to exercise caution when driving their vehicles from school lots throughout the day. An additional safety concern is presented by school safety experts who note that most violence at schools, including shootings, occurs on school grounds, particularly in parking areas.

Completed Actions

- 1. At both campuses bus drop-off and pick-up points have been separated from other vehicle traffic to the extent feasible.**
- 2. DCES traffic flow patterns were designed when the lower parking area was constructed. Buses were separated from other vehicles for student pickup. A light was installed to notify parents not to drive into the bus area when students are loading.**

Proposed Actions:

- 1. Parking spaces at FMS/PCHS will be numbered and assigned to provide better information with regard to who is on the grounds and who is not (including students who may violate the closed campus rule and drive off during the day). As part of the parking management plan, areas will be designated for student, staff, pool and visitor parking.**
- 2. New signage will be installed to create a oneway traffic flow through the main parking area.**
- 3. A student drop-off and pick-up location will be designated– sidewalk on eastside of PCHS near the grass area.**
- 4. Access to the north side of PCHS will be limited to designated staff parking, trash pickup, and some deliveries.**
- 5. Crosswalks will be painted on the blacktop at sidewalk connecting points.**
- 6. Camera surveillance will be increased. The donation of a sophisticated surveillance system is a significant factor in the provision of increased security on school grounds. The General Fund budget includes funds for staff to monitor cameras. The monitors will be able to communicate to administrators and security personnel about unusual behaviors or misconduct on campus. The system will also allow monitoring of each campus by the Sheriff's office when school is not in session.**
- 7. Increased "adult presence" is needed on the PCHS lot after school when students are gathering around vehicles. Further assessment is needed to determine if this can be accomplished through staff assignments or through the use of paid security personnel.**
- 8. Further discussion and study are needed to determine reasonable ways to improve safety on the FMS lot west of the school including location of the playground.**

TARGET 3 - CONTROL AND MONITOR ACCESS TO SCHOOL BUILDINGS

Both the SSATC and Rubicon recommend single access points for each school building with other emergency exits locked, and possibly alarmed, to prevent entry. Whether or not the entry door should be locked is an issue related to implementation of Safety Target #1. With increased perimeter security, there may be less need to lock the entry door if that door is monitored by a volunteer or staff member and also monitored through video surveillance.

The single access concept applies particularly to initial student entry into a school and to visitors. However, additional access becomes necessary during the day based on school activities- e.g. movement from the school to the ball field for physical education or movement of students from the playground to the building. PCHS was designed to allow students to exit the cafeteria to eat outside. Additional access is also necessary for staff when hauling materials and equipment to and from their vehicles.

Questions remain about the use of student identification badges. When groups of students move from building to building, difficulties remain in preventing non-students from entering with groups of students.

Completed Actions:

1. A card access system has been installed at designated locations to allow staff access.
2. Staff members are required to wear identification badges.
3. Visitors and itinerant staff are required to “check in” when they enter the building and to wear a visitor’s pass.

Proposed Actions:

1. Additional card access is being installed on doors as needed for movement of students from the playground at DCES.
2. Camera surveillance is being installed at exits. The system will have the capacity to alert the monitor when there is movement at the door. Further review of door alarm systems is being conducted by the Maintenance Director.
3. Technology advances now allow for quick background checks on visitors. We are studying the feasibility of using these tools as well as considering the positive and negative impacts they might bring.
4. The SSATC recommended investigating how to ensure better visibility at the entry to DCES. The Principal is pursuing this recommendation and seeking to move office staff to allow for a direct view of the entrance.
5. Further discussion and study by students and staff be undertaken at the high school and middle school with regard to student identification badges.

TARGET 4 - INCREASE OUR FOCUS ON A “POSITIVE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT”

The first premise of the SSATC is that “a positive learning environment is the outcome of a school climate where students, staff, parents and community feel welcome, respected, trusted, heard, accepted and safe.” School safety experts and educators have linked these environmental characteristics to increased student achievement. District Expectations established by the Board include “Safe Schools with Positive Learning Environments.”

Throughout the past decade, the District has undergone significant facility changes to improve the school environment. The new FMS/PCHS building was constructed with a clear focus of creating a positive setting for learning and work. This was followed by renovations at FMS, DCES and the District Complex. Visitors to the District note the cleanliness and positive “feeling” of our facilities.

Regardless of the quality of the facilities, the primary factors in a positive school environment are grounded in relationships that reflect respect, in rules that establish order, and in consistent and fair implementation of behavior expectations and conduct codes. Over the past seven years, surveys of students, parents, and staff have generated responses indicating that the environments at our schools are positive. However, interactions with staff and students, and observations of practices at the schools do reflect a need to continue to focus on this target. There is a need for consistency of rules and behavioral expectations from school-to-school and among teachers within schools.

Proposed Actions:

- 1. We are now pursuing implementation of a District-wide Positive Behavior Support (PBS) system that we believe will add to a positive school environment for all.**
- 2. Rules at each school are to be reviewed and, if necessary, revised to increase consistency of expectations and enforcement across schools**
- 3. Principals or their designees are delegated responsibility for assuring that staff know and consistently enforce the student conduct code and make administrators aware of any discriminatory, harassing or bullying behaviors.**

Target 5 - ENHANCE STUDENT AND STAFF SAFETY AWARENESS AND FOSTER REPORTING

In Premise II, the SSATC states, “the most effective tools for securing our campuses are the eyes and ears of our staff, students, and volunteers.” The Final Report and Findings of the Safe School Initiative concluded that “incidents of targeted violence at school rarely are sudden, impulsive acts. Prior to most incidents, other people knew about the attacker’s idea and/or plan to attack. Most attackers engaged in some behavior prior to the incident that caused others concern or indicated a need for help. In many cases, other students were involved in some capacity. Many attackers felt bullied, persecuted or injured by others prior to the attack. Researchers continue to find that students, when interviewed report much higher rates of discrimination, harassment and bullying in their schools than do teachers or administrators.”

We can’t afford to ignore the potential that these behaviors are present in our schools and we can’t forget the nexus to school violence. While heightened awareness is critical to safety, it is not sufficient without an aggressive effort to break the “code of silence” prevalent among youth. Students and staff must have clear knowledge of ways to report information that can prevent possible violence in schools and must know that such reporting will result in preventive actions by school and law enforcement officials.

Proposed Actions:

- 1. Principals and/or their designees are responsible for promoting safety awareness and for fostering an environment conducive to reporting of potentially unsafe circumstances or individuals. Teachers are to engage students in conversations (within small enough groups for participants to interact and ask questions) about safety awareness, about breaking the “code of silence” when safety is an issue, and the need to report any unusual activities or “strangers” at the school. These “conversations” are to be built into the educational schedule at least once each semester. At both times, the Safe2Tell phone number is to be provided to students and information about Safe2Tell discussed. Safe2Tell posters are to be displayed in common areas to regularly remind students of the phone number.**
- 2. Principals and/or their designees are delegated the responsibility, as a matter of standard practice, for seeking to identify specific behaviors, perhaps by specific students, that are harmful and implementing specific instructional/counseling strategies to eliminate these behaviors at school, at school activities, or during school transport. This information may be acquired by direct observations, asking staff to observe and report, talking with individual students and/or parents, holding focus groups, or conducting surveys. The surveillance cameras may be a tool for identifying problems in common areas and in parking lots.**

- 3. Principals and/or their designees are delegated responsibility for assuring that their schools implement a research-based anti-discrimination, harassment, bullying program or for implementing a new program with an evaluation component. The program should address the specific behaviors of concern at that school as identified in action 1.**

TARGET 6 - INCREASE STAFF/SECURITY/VOLUNTEER PRESENCE

The presence of adults is clearly a deterrent to students engaging in behaviors that are potentially harmful to others or that may destroy property. At no time should students be left unsupervised. The SSATC recommended that each school have an SRO. Whether or not an SRO is necessary/feasible or whether each school should have a security guard requires further discussion involving the Park County Commissioners and Sheriff.

Proposed Actions:

- 1. Principals or their designees are delegated responsibility for assuring an adult presence in hallways during passing times, in student gathering areas, including parking areas, and at extra-curricular events.**
- 2. The Board will pursue the feasibility of additional School Resource Officers with the Sheriff and County Commissioners as recommended by the SSATC. The use of security officers who are not SROs will also be considered. The costs for such services will likely need to be covered by an additional property taxes generated by law enforcement authority funding approved by voters.**

Target 7 – CONDUCT ROUTINE FACILITY SAFETY INSPECTIONS

The Maintenance Director and Head Custodian are required, by policy, to complete a thorough safety and maintenance inspection of each facility and surrounding grounds during summer and in January. Such inspections are held to determine that all safety systems are fully operational, that mechanical, electrical and security systems are operating safely and necessary structural or equipment repairs are identified. The inspection includes a review of the storage of chemicals and toxic materials and compliance with State Health Regulations. Any identified safety hazards are to be repaired, replaced or removed.

Completed Actions:

- 1. Facilities and grounds are inspected twice a year.**
- 2. Principals are delegated responsibility for assuring that inspections occur and that followup safety actions are completed.**

Proposed Actions:

- 1. Extend inspections to include “security” considerations- e.g. alarms on doors.**
- 2. Have each SAC review the inspection reports (see Target 10).**

TARGET 8 – CONTINUE BUS SAFETY INSPECTIONS AND DRIVER TRAINING ON SAFE TRANSPORT PRACTICES.

The Transportation Director is delegated responsibility for maintaining safe buses and for notifying the Superintendent when replacement buses are needed. The Director is also expected to offer an ongoing training program for drivers on safe transport practices including ways to make travel on the bus a positive experience. Bus drivers are responsible for consistent enforcement of the student conduct code and for monitoring student compliance with bus rules.

Recommendations by the SSATC to allow only students with IDs to ride buses and to implement the School Bus Watch program require further administrative review.

The SSATC recommendation to put a road behind FMS and PCHS for bus pickup and drop-off would be extremely costly, and we are not sure it would significantly increase safety. Such a road was considered when the facility was constructed in 1999/2000 and deemed to be costly and dangerous (dynamiting behind FMS).

Completed Actions:

- 1. Safety checks are completed on buses before each “run.”**
- 2. Mechanical safety inspections of buses are completed on a regular cycle.**

Proposed Actions:

- 1. Administrators will review the SSATC’s transportation recommendations and provide a response to the Board.**
- 2. Identify resources for bus driver training on managing bus situations that create dangerous circumstances– e.g. weapon, angry adult boarding bus, etc.**
- 3. Review recommendations to allow only students with IDs to ride buses and to implement the School Bus Watch program. The Superintendent will initiate the review with the Transportation Director.**

TARGET 9 -REFINE, THROUGH INTERAGENCY COOPERATION, OUR CRISIS MANAGEMENT PLANS AND PRACTICES

School and District administrators have been involved in meetings with other agencies to assess the strengths and weakness of current plans. Additionally, considerable time has been devoted to identifying “lessons learned.” These activities will result in ongoing refinement of crisis management plans and regular practices of the plan. Communication with staff about safety and emergency plan content and resulting responsibilities is a critical component.

Proposed Actions:

- 1. Continue refinement of plans and schedule regular practices to be prepared for crisis situations.**
- 2. Principals to develop strategies for communicating safety/emergency plan content and responsibilities to staff.**

TARGET 10 - MONITOR SCHOOL SAFETY ANNUALLY

The SSATC recommended continuation of a district-wide committee that reviews and evaluates security and safety measures that are put into place. We concur that on-going monitoring and adjustments are necessary components to maintaining safe schools. Rather than having a separate committee, it seems most appropriate that School Advisory Councils and the District Accountability Committee take on this responsibility. Committee membership can be expanded and members of the SSATC invited to join.

Proposed Actions:

- 1. Revise Policy 108 to expand the charges of the School Advisory Councils and the District Accountability Committee to include safety monitoring.**

SUMMARY

Multiple sources and resources have contributed to this initial effort to target areas of focus for enhancing school safety. We are especially grateful to the SSATC members who contributed their time, learnings, and opinions that resulted in the report containing safety recommendations. This is a first step, and we have not addressed all recommendations from the SSATC or Rubicon in this Position Paper. However, we have ten focus targets to begin diligent work on enhancing school safety in Platte Canyon. It is likely that roadblocks will be encountered with some of the specified actions, and it is also likely that new information will elevate other courses of action as priorities.

A safety enhancement grid has been developed as a way to document safety recommendations, responses and status. The grid should be useful for school administrators, School Advisory Councils, the District Accountability Committee and the Board as safety is monitored on a routine basis. The grid is included as an addendum to this report.

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