

Columbia Community Unit School District No. 4

Commonly Asked Questions

SCHOOL SAFETY

Some parents have recently reached out to school administrators to ask various questions about student safety and security measures at CUSD 4. This document reflects a compiled list of questions and answers relative to school safety. The intent is to make this information available for all parents, and to update questions as they arise. If you have a question that is not included, please send to Dr. Segobiano at (segobiano.gina@columbia4.org) or to your child's building principal. To view a complete list of School Safety Measures, please go to the district's home page and under "About the District", you will find a School Safety link.

1. What recent steps has Columbia High School implemented to enhance school safety?

Since the Parkland tragedy, several new safety procedures have been enacted and communicated by teachers and/or the CHS daily bulletin:

- Morning drop-off is restricted to the front entrance.
- Access control has been tightened, regulating specific doors for entry and exit.
- Students can no longer eat lunch at the outside eating area. The door to the back parking lot will be locked during the day.
- Students have been directed to not open locked doors for other students.
- "See Something, Say Something" emphasized.
- Signs have been placed on exterior doors indicating main entrance only.
- A second TV monitor has been installed in the office to increase live streaming of surveillance cameras that are located at various locations inside and outside the high school.

2. When a threat is reported to the administration, what steps are taken to ensure student safety?

Any report that would jeopardize student safety is taken seriously with immediate reaction by the administration. The principal quickly acts and ensures all students and staff are safe and out of harms way. The student who allegedly makes a threat is removed from general circulation, questioned, and parents are contacted.

Locker/backpacks are searched. Disciplinary consequences are administered if it was determined there was a Code of Conduct violation. Staff members conduct a student threat assessment to evaluate the risk and severity with law enforcement notification as warranted.

After the initial steps are complete, the administration conducts a thorough investigation that includes: witness accounts, more in-depth interview with student of concern, interview with target of threat (if identified), precipitating or motivating events such as bullying, suicidal thoughts, relationship break-up, teacher/counselor interviews, parent interview, identification of observable behavior changes, discipline history, any Internet histories, hobbies and interests, search of locker/car, and any other information relative to

the investigation. After information is gathered, the administrator can adequately determine the level of disciplinary consequence and identify interventions and supports needed for the student. If the threat was deemed credible, the student does not return to general circulation until prescribed disciplinary measures are fulfilled, and a safety plan is in place.

3. Will the parents ever be told the results of the investigation or if a student of concern returns to school?

School officials cannot disclose student identifying information that includes all educational and disciplinary records. Therefore, the school district cannot make a public announcement when a student fulfills his or her disciplinary consequence. The Illinois Student Records Act, Illinois School Code, and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) restrict any disclosure to the public relative to identifying a student and any student discipline. The principal can not share any information on any student other than the parent's own child. So, when a parent asks how long a student is suspended, the principal can only say the Code of Conduct has been followed. For students who violate a Level III misconduct, the student could be expelled from school, but only after the student has due process and a fair and impartial hearing is conducted. In order for a student to be expelled, the Board of Education must take action in open session. The student's name would be redacted, but the expulsion period would be approved and on record. This motion would be public information and reflected on board minutes that are posted after approval on the district's website.

Parents will have to trust that school officials adhere to the established policies and procedures outlined in the Student Handbook. Student discipline is also governed by the Illinois School Code which sets forth disciplinary guidelines and disciplinary consequences.

4. Parents felt that communication about the threat was delayed and should have been sent sooner. What is the threshold for determining when parents will be notified of a school threat?

If students were in imminent danger, parents would be immediately notified through mass telephone communication and email. Examples of imminent danger or an emergency that would trigger immediate notification would be a school evacuation due to a bomb threat, a student bringing a weapon to school, an actual fire, a school shooting threat with an exact date identified, or a lock down for a true emergency situation.

When students are not in imminent danger, school officials will initiate a public statement after the evaluation of the threat is completed to determine the severity of the situation. If law enforcement is also conducting an investigation, the school district will preserve the integrity of the police investigation and will not deliver a public statement that could interfere or jeopardize that investigation. Columbia School District does have an informational sharing Intergovernmental Agreement with the Columbia Police Department, and rely upon the police department to join efforts with the school district to ensure safety and security.

Recognizing the concern and fear that parents face learning about a threat through social media instead of the school district ignited a heightened level of anxiety. From this most recent experience and listening to parent concerns, if at all possible, notification to parents will occur as soon as feasible with communicating allowable general information.

5. The parent email that notified parents of the threat seemed vague with limited information. Why aren't more details communicated?

Public releases must only include lawful information that adhere to student privacy and confidentiality rights. School officials are restricted from identifying the student, sharing discipline sanctions, or providing details of the specific Code of Conduct violation. The student has a right to a fair hearing, if applicable, so any information publicly released prematurely could prevent a student from substantive due process. The school can communicate to parents the general violation (i.e. threat, weapon, fight, bomb), if law enforcement was notified, and can ensure actions were taken to ensure safety of the students through established policies.

6. If a student is suspended or expelled, how can the district ensure the student will not return on school grounds?

Students who are suspended or expelled from school are not permitted to physically be on school grounds and attend school sponsored events – home or away – throughout the suspension and/or expulsion. The student is in the parent or guardian's custody, and the parent and the student are fully aware of this expectation. The administration would immediately notify the police in the event a student did not abide by the suspension/expulsion requirements.

7. When a threat has been made to the school (or students/facility/etc), what are the general procedures that are taken against the student? What determines the length of suspension? When is it determined that the student should be expelled? Should the case prove the allegations are true, what happens to the student at that point?

When a threat is reported, the administration immediately begins the investigation and conducts due process with said student(s). If the threat is founded, appropriate discipline is taken per the district's Code of Conduct. Parents of the involved students are contacted. Interventions may also be provided to families if applicable. The length of suspension is determined by the level of infraction (Level I, II, or III.) If a student violates a Level III Code of Conduct violation (Student Handbook), the student can be suspended for up to 10 days which could lead to expulsion depending upon the severity of the violation. For example, a weapons violation or a bomb threat would deem the maximum length of expulsion, which is 2 years. Students have a right to a suspension and/or expulsion hearing. Students are not allowed on school property during suspensions and expulsions. Law enforcement is involved as the severity dictates, and the States Attorney can impose criminal charges through the Juvenile Court System if the student is a minor (under age 18.)

8. Social media posts insinuate that school administration did not take the threat serious and were "hiding" things. Can you comment on that allegation?

Any and all safety concerns reported to the administration are addressed immediately and are top priority. The principal could not have reacted faster to the reported threat. The student of concern was immediately removed from general circulation which ensured no imminent danger existed. All procedures were followed expeditiously. Parents and teachers may be frustrated due to administrators not being able to speak to parents about specific student disciplinary sanctions and/or provide details on another student's

disciplinary circumstance. Adhering to FERPA and student privacy rights should not imply that the administration is not addressing the situation. Parents are asked to please contact the administration to obtain accurate information that can be legally provided.

9. Many parents learned of the threat through a social media post prior to the school sending out official notification. This led to rumors and inaccuracies. Can the school district do a better job at getting timely notification to parents prior to social media spiraling?

The school district should have been the first to notify parents on any school related item. Only school officials can provide accurate information that conforms to the laws set forth and preserve the investigation. When to notify the public about an issue is handled on a case by case basis. Please be assured that immediate communication would have been sent for a crisis situation where the students and staff safety were in question. School officials will always do their best to communicate in a timely manner.

10. What training has Columbia CUSD 4 taken to prepare for a crisis situation such as a school shooting?

Columbia School District was one of the first school districts in the area to train all faculty and staff in the “4E” active intruder drill training with the police department. The 4E model refers to Educate, Evade, Escape, and Engage. Annually, all new teachers are trained, and principals review safety procedures throughout the year during faculty meetings. This year, all teachers spent a half day with the Columbia Police Department to practice the intruder drill. At least one law enforcement drill is conducted each year.

11. My child could not answer my questions when asked about the lock down drill conducted at school. Are you sure the students know what to do in the event a lock down is needed?

Annually, the students practice the following drills: Fire/evacuation, storm or tornado, earthquake, and lock down/intruder. Instead of having just one intruder drill each year, the principals will be scheduling drills more frequently with purposeful dialogue with the students after the drill. The principals will notify parents when the intruder drills will occur for follow-up discussion at home. Also, a “4E” brochure that outlines the program can be accessed from the district website. This brochure includes talking points for your child.

12. Has the school district considered metal detectors, searching backpacks/bags, employing a resource officer, or other safety initiatives?

Each year, an annual school safety meeting is held with school officials and first responders (police/fire). All safety and security measures are discussed with recommendations identified for future implementation. For next year, the district will be scheduling additional intruder drills at different times of the day, will be training teachers on how to use fire extinguishers, and will have an open invitation for police officers to visit Columbia High School and Columbia Middle School.

Decisions to determine the need for a school resource officer or other measures are normally driven by data. When looking at disciplinary trend data, Columbia High School’s highest categories for violations are tardiness, failing to serve an assigned

detention, and cell phone misuse. We are very lucky and proud to report that we have minimal Level III violations (i.e. fighting, drugs, weapons) with “vaping” violations being the most common Level 3 infraction.

13. Can the Eagle Zone after school program at Parkview require parents to “buzz in” for entry to the building?

Yes – tighter access control will be evaluated for the Eagle Zone and Wee Discover programs. Parents will be notified for any procedural changes.

14. I know the students participated in an intruder drill after the Parkland tragedy. Can the school district regularly conduct these drill and in different scenarios (i.e. cafeteria, before school, etc.?)

Yes – adding additional drills throughout the year at different times of the day can be scheduled. The more practice, the better confidence in case an emergency situation occurs.

15. Information posted on social media contradicts what the school district is reporting. How can I be assured information is correct?

Only school district authorities can provide accurate information. Though administrators are restricted on the information shared with the public, accurate information can be provided that does not violate confidentiality laws. Parents are urged to get first hand information from the school administrator by emailing a question or setting up an appointment to meet with a school official. Information posted on social media quite often makes assumptions with inaccurate or false information being communicated.

16. The school district promotes “See Something, Say Something.” If a student makes a report, how is that information handled?

The school district can only investigate allegations that are reported. If students do not share information with teachers and/or administrators, the school district cannot address. Please encourage your child to report any safety or security (or any item) to school authorities. Do not assume what is shared with the police is communicated to the school district. The school district investigates Code of Conduct violations. The police department investigates potential criminal charges. Two separate investigations with two different agencies and two different purposes. Please promote “See Something, Say Something” to give administrators the opportunity to investigate. Also, students and parents are encouraged to use the “Tell Someone” link on the school and district’s home page. This is an anonymous reporting system that is sent directly to the administration.

17. Administrators are not allowed to identify a student and his/her disciplinary record with the staff. If a student is expelled and cannot be on school property, how will a teacher know the identity to enforce the no presence on school property?

Once the district has afforded the student his/her due process rights that include a fair and impartial hearing, the board of education considers evidence and determines the appropriate disciplinary outcome. For an expulsion, the motion would be in open session. Once that motion is approved, the principal will share necessary information

with the staff so that staff members can report any violation of the expulsion requirements (i.e. no presence on school grounds.)

For other individuals that are restricted to be on school grounds through probation or a court order, the faculty and staff will be informed and will report any violations to the administration and/or directly to the police department.

Thank you for taking the time to read this “Q and A” document. For additional questions that are not addressed above, please send to Dr. Segobiano’s attention at segobiano.gina@columbia4.org. Thank you!

Another source available to educate parents would be to access the School Safety Measures document posted on the district’s website. This document is updated each year and is continually reviewed.