



River Forest
Public Schools

District 90 School Climate and Safety Report

Among the many essential goals that school districts must prioritize are those relating to school climate and safety. For obvious reasons, these priorities are vital to protect the well-being of students and staff. Providing a safe and positive school environment includes addressing physical safety and ensuring safe school facilities. However, it is also necessary that individuals are emotionally safe and free from bullying, harassment, prejudice, and exclusion. In District 90, our goal is to exceed these basic protections and provide learning environments that are inspiring, affirming, and accepting so that all members of the school community possess a sense of belonging and are able to grow and learn in fulfilling ways.

D90 conducted a comprehensive safety and school climate review in 2019 resulting in the Board of Education's adoption of 16 critical recommendations intended to improve our climate and responses to safety-related concerns. The team that conducted this review was comprised of local emergency response personnel (police and fire), social workers, school staff, and administrators. The multifaceted charge to this team included,

- Assess the safety elements that are already in place
- Investigate “best practices” in school safety and student support as recommended by reputable school safety entities and experts
- Determine appropriate recommendations that would markedly improve safety conditions within our schools.

Areas of specific focus included physical safety, the safety of facilities, protections for the emotional safety of individuals and groups, supports for emotional health and well-being, and programmatic structures aligned to strategic safety goals. The recommendations were developed through the efforts of three distinct subcommittees:

- *Campus Security and Strategies*
- *Emotional Well-Being*
- *Plans and Procedures*

Since 2019, the ongoing implementation of these recommendations has been vital in our efforts to foster affirming school climate, build unity and community, and strengthen the foundation of our school safety response procedures.

The following information is intended to summarize and describe some of the approaches that District 90 takes to prioritize safety throughout our school community. Please see below for a listing of these items and a brief description of how they contribute to our school community's safety/climate conditions.

1. **Interior Door Locks** – All door interior keysets were replaced with manual push-button locks. In addition, procedures were instituted that staff members will have their classroom door keys on their person at all times.
2. **Communication Devices** – New public address systems were installed at both Lincoln and Willard Schools to match the quality of the current system at Roosevelt. All three public address systems are now tied to District backup generators. The systems have a secondary access location to allow for emergency access in each building. Two-way radios are assigned for dedicated use by key staff members (i.e., Physical Education, Lunch Supervision, Recess Monitoring, Nurses).
3. **Shared Elementary Social Worker** – To further support student and family needs, the District hired an additional full-time elementary social worker. The District is very fortunate to have an excellent social work team at both the elementary and middle school levels. Our social workers have addressed many issues that affect students, including anxiety, bullying, belongingness, eating disorders, equity, and inclusiveness. However, the proliferation of social work needs at the elementary level has been notable over recent years. As a result, additional staff was necessary to provide the targeted services intended to prevent or minimize subsequent mental health needs as students grow older.
4. **Visitor Control** – To manage visitor control more closely, all visitors must enter a school's main offices, produce and turn over proper identification, and sign an entry log to receive a visitor badge and enter the building. All visitors must sign out when leaving the building and return the visitor badge to get their identification returned.
5. **Exterior Door Monitoring** – Under no circumstances may exterior doors be propped open when students are occupying school facilities. In addition, panic bars may not be toggled to the "always open" configuration (which allows unrestricted access to the building from the exterior.) Only one entrance at each building is designated (preferably the main entrance) for visitors. This procedure must be followed for a variety of events, including parent/teacher conferences, open houses, and all evening events. When large-scale evening or weekend events require multiple entrances, they must be staffed at all times by designated "greeters" assigned to monitor entrances for safety.
6. **Signage** – All undesignated exterior entrances are locked at all times and have a sign that reads "**All Visitors Report to Main Entrance, Door #X.**" Interior room signage and room windows with durable and consistent signs (with tactile Braille) have been installed at all schools. Willard classrooms were also re-numbered in a more logical sequence. Signage has also been added to the Lincoln and Willard parking lots reading "**No Student Drop-off or Pick-Up**" to reduce pedestrian/car interactions as well as unidentified cars in the lots.
7. **Surveillance** – The number of interior and exterior surveillance cameras has been substantially increased across the District. These are useful in monitoring our facilities to prevent incidents and after incidents to document what has occurred. Full access to District 90 surveillance cameras has been granted to Village of River Forest first responders allowing for improved response and understanding about active incidents.

8. **Lighting** – Exterior lighting coverage at Lincoln and Willard Schools has been upgraded to match the quality of LED lighting already installed at Roosevelt Middle School.
9. **Behavioral Threat Assessment Team** – The District is in the process of implementing a new Behavioral Threat Assessment Team (BTAT) to serve all three schools. The behavioral threat assessment team model convenes individuals from diverse roles across the school district to hear concerns, review relevant information, and consider strategies to proactively meet the needs of individuals who are experiencing extreme stressors or in crisis. BTAT members are charged with developing and implementing proactive approaches that address aggressive and/or threatening acts against individuals, facilities, or the concerning individuals themselves. Teams typically include school social workers, administrators, faculty, and pre-identified community partners (i.e., mental health practitioners, school resource officers, etc.). It is anticipated that the D90 BTAT will be in place and operational by the end of the current school year (2021-22).
10. **Continue Use of SUPPORT4U** – The District continues to advertise and utilize the SUPPORT4U text-a-tip line that went live for the first time in May 2018. With the leadership and assistance from the River Forest and Oak Park Townships and several local mental health partners, Districts 200, 97, and 90 have been advertising this service to all students and families in the Oak Park and River Forest communities. As an anonymous and confidential support resource, this system offers a valuable mental health tool for individuals who are experiencing mental health challenges or crises in real-time.
11. **Ongoing, Targeted Professional Development** – D90 has been providing ongoing, targeted professional development for staff regarding trauma and mental health-related topics. While professional development time is at a premium, it is essential that student mental health needs remain at the forefront while also ensuring that an equitable perspective is incorporated into any professional development sessions. Such training will continue and include support on topics such as inclusiveness, belonging, and stereotype threat. The professional training/supports are integrated as part of our broader staff development program and emphasize increased staff awareness and effective responsiveness.
12. **Improve Procedural Clarity and Consistency** - Efforts have been made to improve uniformity in implementing foundational safety protocols across the District. As children matriculate from the elementary schools to the middle school and substitute teachers and D90 staff often work in multiple school buildings, it is vital that all D90 schools implement consistent procedures. Examples of this are the response protocols for crisis/emergency situations.
13. **Review Communications Processes During Emergencies** – District 90 communications frameworks have been updated to ensure that all staff members have the ability to report emergency conditions quickly. Additionally, emergency communications plans have been streamlined, and areas of ambiguity clarified. Training on emergency response protocols is

provided for all employees at each school annually, and emergency response information is readily available in multiple formats.

14. **Update Classroom, Office, and Nurse Resources** – All emergency resources have been reviewed for relevance and functionality, including emergency reference flip charts, emergency envelopes, the Crisis-Go app, and first aid supply backpacks. Designed in partnership with local first responders, D90 emergency plans reflect best practice, are readily available in the case of emergency, and are reviewed/updated with RF first responders annually.
15. **Bolster Current Security Practices and Routines** – All staff members are required to wear District 90 identification when school is in session, and staff is trained to never permit access by unknown or unauthorized personnel or visitors. District 90 follows all state requirements pertaining to background checks for non-employees who must work on-site during the instructional day and restricts access for those individuals from students at all times.
16. **Refine and Clarify Emergency Drill Protocols** – Emergency drill protocols and practices are audited annually. Current protocols specifying particular responses for various emergency scenarios have been reviewed to reflect best practices. Key elements include, but are not limited to, off-site evacuations, emergencies occurring at unusual times during the school day, response protocols during concurrent emergencies, reunification procedures, and essential communications considerations.

With the ongoing implementation of these recommendations, District 90 continues to work toward a goal of providing a safe and affirming school environment at all times for all individuals. A physically safe environment, along with one that is free from harassment, bullying, exclusion, prejudice, and other emotional harms, is absolutely necessary to fulfill our obligations to our students, families, faculty, and staff. Simply, the classroom and school experience is constrained unless both physical and emotional safety are present.

District 90 thanks all community members and partners for the support as we continue to pursue our foundational objectives: to protect the health and safety of all members of the D90 community and maintain a high-quality, equitable program of in-person instruction for all students.

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