

School and Student Safety Q&A's

Q: What is the district's commitment to school and student safety?

A: RRPS has a strong commitment to school and student safety. We believe teaching and learning takes place when all members of the education community feel safe. RRPS utilizes many proactive measures and continues to enhance our procedures and infrastructure. Community support for bonds and the two-mill levy helps us fund these essential security initiatives.

Q: What are the current problems or issues in regards to keeping our children safe?

A: Some of the issues we face are drug and alcohol problems, mental health issues among students and families, fighting on campus, poverty and homelessness, students at risk for self-destructive behaviors as well as sudden emergencies. Keeping everyone safe is a collaborative effort involving our security department, school staff and students. We encourage our students to talk to a trusted adult about potential and existing concerns. By promoting universal awareness and providing multiple avenues to communicate these concerns, we maximize our effectiveness throughout the district.

Q: What about active shooters?

A: When dealing with any kind of safety issue our biggest asset is our internal security force, many of whom come to us from other disciplines of public safety such as retired police, fire, and military. These individuals know how to deal with the public and students, are trained to observe and evaluate potential safety situations, and know how to intercede before incidents occur.

We provide regular active shooter preparedness training for our staff, students and the community through our own security department as well as the Rio Rancho Police Department (RRPD). RRPD also provides support through a School Resource Officer (SRO's) program. SROs are assigned to each high school and available to support middle schools and elementary schools when the need arises. The RRPD is a visible and valuable partner in promoting and providing security for our schools.

Q: What are we currently doing to ensure the safety of students?

A: Ensuring student safety involves a systemic approach to security beginning with our infrastructure. Our practices have been in place for a long time, in spite of funding restrictions. Some of our practices include:

1. Controlled access to perimeter doors into our buildings requiring visitors to check into the administration office prior to granting them access into the main facility. Visitors must submit a driver's license and undergo an "instant" digital background check on Raptor. These doors are digitally controlled and can be locked down remotely in case of an emergency.
2. We have cameras at each site and more than 100 high-quality video cameras were installed this past year, allowing multiple location views from our high school control rooms.
3. A professional security force throughout our school system.

4. Enhanced fencing on perimeters and hardening fences (in progress).
5. Threat assessments are completed at all schools to determine vulnerability and improve security.
6. Ability to call in RRPD, FBI, and other agencies as needed, to conduct immediate investigations and mobilize to counteract threats.
7. Social media monitoring.
8. Ongoing training with staff (run, hide, fight).
9. Enhanced curriculum for security (in progress).
10. Regular emergency drills.
11. Cross-training with other agencies.
12. Flexibility to move security personnel quickly and efficiently when necessary.

Q: How do legal agencies work with the schools to help ensure school and student safety?

A: The courts are not directly involved, but the Sandoval County Board works with at-risk students. The Sandoval County Board interacts with RRPS personnel to determine how the juvenile justice system can work with schools to provide services and interventions. The Office of Probation supervises youth who are under the supervision of the courts and collaborates with the SRO's in the schools. Probation officers can meet with students at the schools and provide a quick response when parents and community bring concerns about students under their supervision.

Q: What are some of our plans for the future?

A: RRPS continues to enhance security at all levels and, as funding increases, elementary schools will soon have the same security as the high schools. We will expand access controls to include interior doors (classrooms) to supplement our current electronic controls of external doors. As these expansions occur, fire code mandates will determine which doors will be locked and when.

Other ongoing plans include a "Bullying Report Form" with anonymous reporting capabilities that was recently deployed and a Protocols and Emergency Plans (Crisis Manager App) that is already in place.

Q: What about arming our teachers?

A: In lieu of arming our teachers, we are considering arming our security officers. Many of these employees are retired police and military already familiar with firearm laws and their prudent use.

Q: Are the right resources available, both human and physical, to address safety challenges?

A: Enhancing our security with the right resources and personnel is an ongoing process that often faces funding challenges. Legislative changes to retirement laws would enable us to better attract law enforcement retirees into the school system. These individuals come to us with the necessary training and expertise that provides the kind of "ready-to-go" security we need.

Other physical resources to be added, as funding permits, include increased access control and fencing.

Q: Can we put metal detectors in our schools? What about “wanding” for weapons?

A: The law currently prevents RRPS from putting these measures in place.

Q: Can we search student backpacks as they arrive at school?

A: Schools operate under various levels of oversight, not only board and superintendent, but state and federal law. Since the 1980’s, courts have looked at the issue of searches in schools and hold that a search warrant is not necessary if there is reasonable individualized suspicion that a student has committed a violation in the school setting. However, the law prohibits schools from searching all bags as students enter the school.

Q: What does the school district do to prevent student misbehavior?

A: Specific interventions such as positive behavior supports, anti-bullying programs, counseling and mentoring address the needs of at-risk students. Prevention is always better than intervention. RRPS focuses on instructional programs that keep students engaged and extracurricular/co-curricular activities to help students be connected to the school community and family. Right now we do not receive money through the funding formula for safety and security, requiring the District to use teaching and learning funding. We can utilize funds generated through the Two-Mill Levy for our infrastructure needs, which is why reauthorizing that Levy every six years is so crucial. We hope additional funding from the state and federal level, specifically for safety and security, will be discussed by the legislature.

Q: Why don’t you expel a student for certain incidents that happen at school?

A: When a student’s needs go beyond the typical school accommodations we endeavor to move them into the appropriate settings that can help them complete their education. Additionally this provides them with the special interventions needed for their situation. These programs are often at a higher cost than a general education setting but address their needs and offer an alternative to expulsion.

Q: What is the school district’s authority when it comes to expelling a student?

A: The right to a public education may only be denied for very limited purposes and only after a student has been allowed their due process of law. The process for expelling a student does not happen without the completion of a comprehensive investigation to gather facts and a hearing as set forth in 6.11.2.12 NMAC. If the student is a threat, he/she can be removed into custody or to a parent.

Q: If a student is taken by police from campus for an incident, what happens next?

A: If Law enforcement detains a child these steps are taken:

1. Children, Youth and Families Department (CYFD) is notified
2. CYFD does an assessment to determine whether the child should be held based on the information presented about the child and the situation
3. Within 48 hours a judge makes a determination on whether the child should continue to be held or should be released
4. If the child is detained, a probable cause determination must be presented to a judge who makes the determination
5. The judge decides the determination in a detention hearing
6. Multiple factors are considered in that determination with the intent being a quick decision and determination of consequences

Q: If I have a safety concern, who should I contact?

A: If it needs to be handled immediately, please call 911. If the concern does not require immediate attention, you may contact any district administrator. You can also use the RRPD non-emergency number. Please do not report the concern through social media, instead contact a designated authority outlined above.

Q: What can parents and community members do to help?

A: School safety is a collaborative effort involving students, teachers, parents and community members.

1. Stay vigilant. If a student becomes withdrawn, try connecting with them and get involved in their lives in a positive way.
2. Say something. If you think there is threatening behavior on the part of your child or another student, please report it. Don't assume "someone else" will alert the school or that the concern will go away on its own.
3. If you see something in your own child, get counseling. CYFD is a good resource to help you address substance abuse, emotional issues, etc.
4. Supervise your child's social media and the internet activity and teach them the "negative" side of unfettered online communication.
5. Know your student's friends and activities.
6. Encourage your child to participate in healthy activities (sports, clubs, and fine arts) rather than spending all of their time in solitary activities.
7. Be involved in the community and the schools. Ask your students, "How was your day?" Initiate conversations.
8. Encourage legislative action to support funding for school safety and security and allow for changes in the retirement law and laws that prevent schools from searching bags, or using metal detectors or wands when needed.
9. Take the time to substantiate rumors and identify facts. Don't contribute to rumors that are unfounded.
10. Reassure your children they are safe in school. Encourage them to learn safety measures so they are prepared in the unlikely event they are needed.