



SUNSET RIDGE SCHOOL DISTRICT 29

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Cultivating an inclusive learning community that engages the hearts and minds one child at a time.

SAFETY & SECURITY IN DISTRICT 29

The following document was originally created in February 2018 to provide the Sunset Ridge District 29 community with general information regarding our safety/security features, protocols, and procedures. While no safety feature can provide a 100% guarantee of protection, we believe District 29 is well-prepared to prevent and respond to emergencies and potential threats to the safety of our schools. This conclusion has been validated by the multiple school safety and security experts that have and continue work with District 29 in this rapidly evolving dimension of public education.

Building Features

Sunset Ridge School was designed with consultation from a nationally recognized school security expert (see “Expert Consultation” below). The layout was purposefully organized to maximize separation between the more public areas of the school and the classrooms. Between building sections, automated security systems restrict movement to isolate a potential threat. Building materials include bullet-resistant glass, reinforcement and electronically controlled and monitored ingress and egress points, and integrated emergency communication systems.

A \$2M renovation to Middlefork School in 2021 enhanced security at the main entrance and at each individual classroom. Following an external security audit in 2022, additional security improvements were made at Middlefork to reinforce and secure points of ingress/egress.

Both buildings are supported by integrated security, fire, and smoke detection systems and comprehensive video-monitoring systems (see “Video Surveillance” below).

Controlled Access

Both Middlefork and Sunset Ridge Schools utilize access control systems that restrict ingress/egress to our schools. All outer doors are kept locked at all times. Only staff who possess a registered electronic key fob may enter the buildings through these locked access points. The use of access points is tracked and monitored through an electronic ‘key fob’ system.

During school hours, all visitors must enter our buildings through a secure vestibule at the main office, and be approved to proceed beyond a locked entry point. Approval for entry requires all visitors to provide identification and pass an electronic background check through the Raptor Visitor Management System (see “Visitor Management System” below).

Background Checks and Vendor Supervision

All employees, individuals that have a consistent presence on District property, and individuals participating in overnight trips MUST complete and successfully pass a comprehensive, fingerprint-based, criminal background check conducted on-site by District 29 staff through the Federal Bureau of Investigation and Illinois State Police prior to entering District facilities. All District employees must also successfully pass a comprehensive background check for allegations of sexual misconduct under Faith's Law prior to starting employment.

Individuals that are not required to complete a comprehensive, fingerprint-based, criminal background check conducted through the Federal Bureau of Investigation and Illinois State Police (e.g., deliveries, emergency repairs, temporary volunteers) are required to remain within "Line-of-Sight" Supervision of a District employee when working in or around District facilities. All individuals entering District property are screened prior to entry through the RAPTOR Visitor Management System. This system identifies any individual in the Sex Offender Registry, and also provides a digital record of all visitors that enter our schools.

Video-Surveillance

Both Middlefork and Sunset Ridge Schools are equipped with comprehensive video surveillance systems. The systems provide real-time viewing inside and outside both schools by designated staff members and the Northfield Police Department. Upgrades to the video surveillance systems were installed in 2023, based on recommendations from an external security audit.

Emergency Plans

All offices and classrooms at Middlefork and Sunset Ridge are equipped with an "Emergency Folder", providing detailed directions to follow in the event of a variety of emergency situations. Emergency plans are reviewed and updated annually by the administrative team in collaboration with the Northfield Police and Fire Department Chiefs and external school safety experts (see "Consultation" below). All emergency plans and procedures were revised in 2023, guided by the recommendations from an external security audit.

Training and Safety Drills

District 29 staff participate in on-going professional development to promote safety and security. Training includes how to prevent and respond to a variety of emergency situations (e.g., injuries, accidents, natural disasters, fire, intruders, interpersonal conflicts). Training includes both whole group and subgroup "what if" exercises to optimize the ability to prevent and respond to emergencies. Training is provided throughout the school year by an established and highly credentialed independent expert in school safety and security.

Staff and students at both Middlefork and Sunset Ridge regularly conduct a variety of safety drills (e.g., Fire, Tornado, Lock Down, Bus Evacuation) throughout the year. Practicing these drills improves our familiarity with what to do in case an emergency event should occur. Local first responders observe our practice drills and provide feedback for improvements.

Supervision Protocols

Middlefork and Sunset Ridge utilize multiple supervision protocols to ensure the safety of interpersonal interactions. All staff/adult-student interactions are required to be both ‘interruptible’ and ‘observable’ at all times. During normal functioning, students are supervised during both structured and unstructured activities and their movement is restricted. Outdoor activities, in particular, are closely monitored by staff, and student movement is restricted to specific supervision zones. During arrival/dismissal periods, where the full student body is outside the confines of the building and visitor presence is maximized, supervision levels are increased and often include District administrators and support staff. During an emergency, all staff have specific supervision duties to ensure the safe execution of the emergency plan.

Professionals from Andy Frain Services facilitate student crossing at the intersection of Willow and Wagner Rd (Middlefork) and Willow and Sunset Ridge Rd (Sunset Ridge) before student arrival and after school dismissal. The Northfield Police Department maintains an increased patrol presence during arrival and dismissal periods, and during special events.

Electronic/Digital Security

District 29 employs a full-time Network and Digital Security Manager to oversee the protection of our systems, our data, and our internet users. Digital hardware and software prevents unauthorized access to, and use of, our systems and flags electronic activity that does not comply with the District’s Electronic Networks Acceptable Use Policy. Our electronic security measures were recently reviewed by an independent digital security firm against the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) best practices for digital security, and recommendations for improvements were implemented.

Communication Systems

Both Middlefork and Sunset Ridge are equipped with multiple internal communication systems. Internally, the Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) phone/intercom system and “Walkie-Talkies” afford staff redundant means to receive and send communications throughout the day. Emergency “panic” buttons in both schools allow instantaneous communication with local first responders.

The “Parent Square” communication system allows the District to send normal and emergency messages to selected groups of parent/guardians, staff, and community partners.

A formal “Reciprocal Reporting Agreement” between District 29 and the Northfield Police Department delineates the protocol for the mutual sharing of information that could impact the safety and security of our schools and community.

The District 29 administrative team communicates and partners with the Northfield Police and Fire Department staff to regularly review safety plans and protocols, coordinate training and support, and respond to emergency situations. Superintendents from the region regularly share safety and security plans, and communicate when security issues emerge.

Expert Consultation

District 29 collaborates with several experts in the field of school safety to inspect our facilities, review safety protocols and to train staff on how to continuously improve safety and security.

Nationally recognized expert, Paul Timm (RETA Security), began working with District 29 in 2010 to review our facilities and protocols, and to provide targeted training for staff. He provided similar support to staff in 2013, 2016, and 2018.

As noted above, nationally recognized school safety expert Dennis Lewis (Edu-Safe) provided expert consultation regarding facilities-related safety enhancement for our capital improvement efforts in 2017. The District 29 administrative team meets annually with the Northfield Police and Fire Chiefs to review our safety and security protocols.

In the winter of 2022, District 29 contracted with National School Safety and Security Services, Inc. to conduct a comprehensive external audit of all District 29 safety and security policies, procedures, protocols, and systems. Recommendations from that audit were reviewed by the District 29 Board of Education and changes implemented by the spring of 2023.

Since the spring of 2022, District 29 has been contracting with School Safety Specialist John Heiderscheidt to provide on-going consultation and staff training for the District on school safety and security. Mr. Heiderscheidt is the former head of security for the second largest school district in Illinois (Elgin U-46) and a nationally recognized expert and school safety trainer. He works with District 29 staff throughout the year to plan, prepare, and practice emergency procedures.

Mental Health Services

District 29 currently employs multiple mental health staff members (e.g., psychologist, mental health counselor, behavioral specialist, social worker). A full-time registered nurse is also employed at each school. These staff members provide a variety of assessment and intervention services to prevent, assess, and respond to emergency situations.

Community Partnerships

District 29 collaborates with local first responders to plan and review emergency response protocols. Officers from the Northfield Police Department are a regular presence at both Middlefork and Sunset Ridge School, assisting with instructional activities and connecting with students. The Northfield Police Department maintains an increased presence around both schools during arrival and dismissal. Given the shared Middlefork facilities with the Northfield Park District, the agencies collaborate on the development and implementation of safety policies, practices, and procedures. District 29 maintains active partnerships with a variety of community mental health agencies and private providers. District leadership from all New Trier Township public schools meet regularly to share safety and security practices, and communicate with each other when potential security threats arise.

Threat Assessment Team

District 29 utilizes an established Threat Assessment Team to investigate and evaluate potential threats. The team includes administration, teachers, mental health professionals, health care

professionals, local law enforcement, and community agency representatives. The team follows the nationally recognized best practices protocol for investigating and evaluating potential threats established by the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Secret Service.

Frequently Asked Questions

How will I know if there is an emergency? You will receive information via the Parent Square System in the format you requested (email, text, phone message). In the event of a school closing, the District will also post notice of its status on the District webpage and on www.emergencyclosingcenter.com.

What is a “Secure Building”? “Secure Building” (formerly known as a “soft lockdown”) is an established protocol, developed in collaboration with the law enforcement, for responding to a potential safety threat. District 29 uses the term “Secure Building” versus a “Soft Lockdown” to maximize the language difference between this type of response and a formal “Lockdown.”

During “Secure Building” status, students and staff are kept inside the school building. Depending on the specific situation, students may remain in a designated area or be allowed to transition between classrooms. Depending on the specific situation, visitor access will be restricted. A communication is sent to all parents/guardians, staff, and community partners.

What is a “Lockdown”? A lockdown is an established protocol, developed in collaboration with law enforcement, for responding to a specific safety threat. All interior doors are locked, and all building occupants remain in assigned locations until directed. No entry or exit to the building or classrooms is allowed. A communication is sent to all parents/guardians, staff, and community partners.

How do I keep my emergency contact information up to date?

All contact information is maintained electronically. If your contact information changes, please provide the up-to-date information to your school secretary.

What should I do in the event of an emergency? Wait for, and listen carefully to, the emergency message sent by the school for directions. PLEASE resist the temptation to come to the school unless directed, as you may not be allowed to enter the school and may hinder the efforts of first responders.