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UNDERSTANDING SCHOOL SAFETY RESPONSIBILITIES: *A Parent Guide*

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Understanding School Safety Responsibilities: *A Parent Guide*

Schools have a legal responsibility to keep students safe from both physical and psychological harm. These responsibilities are grounded in federal and state laws, as well as best practices in education and student welfare.

Here is an overview of what schools are required (and expected) to do:

Physical Safety Responsibilities

Provide a Safe Environment

Schools must ensure buildings, classrooms, playgrounds, and transportation are:

- Secure and well-maintained
- Free from hazards (e.g., fire, electrical, structural dangers)
- Compliant with safety codes and emergency procedures

Protect Against Physical Harm

Staff must:

- Supervise students appropriately
- Intervene in fights or unsafe behavior
- Respond to threats (e.g., weapons, dangerous objects)
- Follow protocols for injuries, illness, and emergencies





Emergency Preparedness

Schools are required to:

- Have safety plans for fire, weather emergencies, lockdowns, and active threats
- Conduct regular drills and staff training
- Communicate emergency procedures to families

Psychological and Emotional Safety Responsibilities

Prevent Bullying and Harassment

Under federal law (especially Title IX and Section 504), schools must:

- Investigate and address bullying, including cyberbullying
- Protect students from harassment based on race, gender, disability, etc.
- Enforce anti-bullying policies and provide support to victims

Provide Mental Health Support

Many schools must:

- Employ or have access to counselors, psychologists, or social workers
- Provide mental health referrals and crisis intervention
- Offer accommodations for students with emotional or behavioral disabilities

Promote a Positive School Climate

Schools are encouraged to:

- Foster respect, inclusion, and cultural responsiveness
- Use positive behavior interventions and supports (PBIS)
- Implement social-emotional learning (SEL) programs





Safety Considerations for Students with Disabilities

Sometimes students with disabilities require extra safety measures because of mobility, cognitive or other issues. These should be discussed at the IEP meeting and included in the IEP.

Examples: A student may require adult supervision at all times outside the classroom or a student may need extra instruction on staying safe in the community.

What Can Parents Expect or Request?

- Clear anti-bullying and discipline policies
- Prompt response to safety concerns or threats
- Participation in behavioral or safety planning if needed for their child
- Open communication during and after incidents
- Accommodations for children with trauma, anxiety, or behavioral needs

What Should Parents Remember?

“All students have the right to learn in an environment where they feel safe, respected, and supported—physically and emotionally.”

If you ever feel that your child’s safety is being neglected, you have the right to:

- Request a meeting with school administrators
- File a complaint with the district or state education agency
- Seek advocacy or legal support if necessary





How Can I Get Help in my Language?

Request interpreter services at your child's school or the school district's office. Request translated written information if needed. Information available to all parents in the school district should be available to you as well.

Legal Foundations of School Safety

- **Title IX (1972):** Protects against sex-based harassment or discrimination in schools.
- **Section 504 & Americans with Disabilities Act:** Protect students with disabilities from discrimination and ensures reasonable accommodations.
- **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act:** Requires schools to address behaviors that interfere with learning for students with disabilities.
- **State child abuse laws:** Mandate school staff to report suspected abuse or neglect.
- **Case law:** Courts have held that schools may be liable if they are deliberately indifferent to known safety threats.

