

School Safety

Schools should be safe places for every student and every adult. This EdGuide provides quick information on some key rules that are in place to protect against possible dangers. In addition, a separate Kentucky Education Guide addresses student behavior and discipline.

HOW DO SCHOOLS PREPARE FOR SAFETY IN CASE OF FIRE, EARTHQUAKE, SEVERE WEATHER, AND DANGERS THAT MAY REQUIRE A SCHOOL LOCKDOWN?

All schools must have emergency plans for fire, severe weather, and earthquakes, and also for situations that require a building lockdown. In developing the plan, the school must seek out collaboration on the plan from local first responders, fire marshals, and law enforcement. The school council must approve the emergency plan and then review it every year. To practice the emergency procedures, schools must conduct drills for earthquakes, severe weather, and lockdowns during the first month of school and again in January, with fire drills held each month.

HOW CAN PARENTS AND GUARDIANS HELP WITH SCHOOL SAFETY IN EMERGENCY SITUATIONS?

Parents and guardians can help by waiting for information before heading to the school when they hear of a possible emergency. Going there immediately may block the path for emergency vehicles and make it harder for the school to check that all students have been located. The school may share directions by phone call, text, email, website announcement, television announcement or radio announcement.

HOW DO SCHOOLS PROTECT AGAINST ADULTS WITH CRIMINAL RECORDS?

School districts cannot employ people who have been convicted of a violent crime or a sex crime classified as a felony. State and national criminal records checks are required for new certified school and district employees (meaning those whose jobs require state certificates, like teachers, principals, librarians, superintendents, and some others), as well as student teachers. A state criminal records check is required for new classified employees (meaning those whose jobs do not require certificates, including aides, bus drivers, clerks, and some others).

State and national checks are also required for parent members of the school council and volunteers who have contact with students on a regularly scheduled or continuous basis, or who have supervisory responsibility for students at school or on school-sponsored trips.

HOW DO SCHOOLS PROTECT AGAINST STUDENTS WHO HAVE COMMITTED CRIMES?

People at school (students, teachers, and so on) have the same right to physical safety as people in any other location.

If one student may have committed a felony against another, school employees must make sure that is reported to the school principal once they know or have “reasonable cause to believe” the crime has occurred. The principal, in turn, must notify the parent or guardian of the harmed student and file a written report with the local school board and law enforcement within 48 hours.

If a student has a history of physically abusing school employees or carrying concealed weapons in school or at school functions, teachers must receive written notice about that behavior before that teacher is assigned to work with or be in contact with the student.

SEEING THE NUMBERS

The State Report Card for the 2014-15 school year shows that with more than 650,000 statewide, there were:

- 35 incidents of first degree assault
- 1,292 incidents of other assaults and violence
- 406 weapons incidents
- 18,842 harassment incidents (including bullying)
- 13,446 drug incidents (including tobacco)
- 767 alcohol incidents

Data for individual schools and districts can be found in the school report cards available at applications.education.ky.gov/src.

CAN SCHOOLS REMOVE STUDENTS WHO ARE A DANGER TO THEMSELVES AND OTHERS?

Yes, students who are a danger to themselves or other people may be removed immediately. The procedure for expelling and suspending students is laid out in the EdGuide on Student Behavior and Discipline, but note that those same rules provide for immediate removal before those procedures when needed to protect human safety.

HOW ARE STUDENTS PROTECTED FROM DANGEROUS PHYSICAL RESTRAINT AND SECLUSION?

Physical restraint and seclusion of students are almost never allowed in Kentucky schools. An exception may be made when the student's behavior "poses an imminent danger of physical harm to self or others," and even then, the student must be visually monitored the entire time and other protective restrictions listed in state regulation must also be followed. Unless the student is over 18 or an emancipated minor, parents must be notified within 24 hours any time restraint or seclusion is used. For the full rules, check out the full regulation at www.lrc.ky.gov/kar/704/007/160.htm.

HOW ARE STUDENTS PROTECTED AGAINST BULLYING AND HARASSMENT?

No student should be bullied or harassed. Obviously, they should be free from physical, social, and emotional mistreatment. In addition, while they are at school, on school-sponsored transportation, and at school-sponsored events, students should never face behavior by other students that counts legally as harassment, including actions that create "a hostile environment by means of any gestures, written communications, oral statements, or physical acts that a reasonable person under the circumstances should know would cause another student to suffer fear of physical harm, intimidation, humiliation, or embarrassment." Harassment incidents must be included in schools' regular reports to the Kentucky Department of Education and are included (without information that could identify individual students) in annual school report cards available at www.education.ky.gov. To learn what your school and district are doing proactively to prevent bullying and help students work together constructively, check with your local school officials.