

Blueprint Step 1: Understanding Your Audience

Who is my principal and what do they do?

The principal is the leader of your child’s school—shaping school culture and values, developing a shared vision, and structuring change efforts to build a safe and supportive learning environment for all students. Among many other responsibilities, your principal guides a leadership team in setting priorities for all within the school community, the district framework and the larger community. They are also responsible for implementing school district, state and federal laws and policies; overseeing the management of the school building; appropriately using budgetary allotments to the school; and developing and implementing—with teachers, parents, community members and students—school goals and objectives. Additionally, your principal hires most—perhaps all—other school employees.

How can I work with my principal to improve school safety?

When it comes to school safety, your principal’s job is to keep all students and employees safe. While principals do face a variety of limitations in their ability to make change, they have a strong ability to pull together all the key stakeholders in a school community, and they are a key figure when it comes to implementing school-wide safety measures and decisions. Your principal and school’s current safety efforts may already be outlined and available on the school or district website, and if so, it is important to familiarize yourself with them. While a conversation about school safety with your principal is a great place to start, if this is your first time broaching this topic with your principal, you might consider starting with an introductory 1:1 call or meeting with them to get a basic understanding of all they currently do to ensure school safety. In doing so, you may learn about the unique pressures your principal faces when it comes to promoting school safety. Whenever possible, helping to address your principal’s unique pressures will increase the likelihood of them working to address your school safety needs.

Write here what you have learned about your principal

Blueprint Step 2: Preparing for Your Conversation

Who should be at this meeting?

When you're ready to facilitate a meeting with your principal, reach out to them by finding their contact information on your school's website or calling your school to schedule a meeting. It's best practice prior to a meeting to review the school website and or any resources the school has sent to families on the topic of school safety to familiarize yourself with the work already underway. Consider inviting other concerned parents and teachers to join the meeting, as it will not only emphasize the importance of school safety in the community but also show your principal they have a group of parents willing to support them in advancing the school's safety measures.

What topics should we discuss at the meeting?

Prior to the meeting, prepare and send an agenda to the participants, especially the principal. Ideally, the agenda should include topics for discussion (or possible discussions) and questions you have related to school safety. An agenda template is provided below. Feel free to customize the template to meet your and your community's needs.

Write here who you will be inviting to the meeting and logistical details

Write here the topics you plan to discuss with your principal

Blueprint Step 3: Discussion and Further Action

Remember that this conversation is an opportunity for you and other families to provide feedback and build a relationship with your school principal around school safety issues.

Take notes, ask questions, listen closely and commit to continued conversation, collaboration and action alongside your principal.

There are many other ways you can collaborate with your school principal beyond this initial conversation. Consider suggesting these relatively simple next steps:

- **Schedule another meeting**, perhaps bringing in more families from your community or other important voices like students.
- **Invite your principal to speak at a PTA meeting** to share existing school safety measures and elicit feedback from families.
- **Ask your principal to highlight school safety in regular communications with families.** If possible, offer to help gather resources to share in those communications.

Or consider these more complex next steps:

- **Ask your principal to host a community forum or survey** to get feedback on safety needs from the whole community. If possible, offer to help design questions and provide feedback on making the survey or event accessible to all families in your community.
- **Work with your principal to help secure more local, state and federal funding to address school safety needs and participate in the annual budget process.**
- **Invite your principal to join a school safety committee, participate in Gun Violence Prevention Week, update the Emergency Operations Plan (EOP) for the school or develop a school safety plan in partnership with families.**

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Write here your notes from the meeting

Write here the next steps and follow up for after the meeting

Sample Meeting Agenda

- **Introductions.** *Who is in attendance, what is their role and relationship to the school? Why is the issue of school safety important to them?*
- **Concerns & Incidents.** *What is the process for students, teachers and families to report when they witness a concerning behavior? What is the protocol for responding to such concerns? When an incident occurs, like a student bringing a weapon to school, what is the protocol for responding and communicating with families about the incident? In what situations would a referral be made to a mental health professional or to law enforcement?*
- **Training & Drills.** *How are staff trained to respond to emergencies or when they witness violence or other concerning behaviors? Do they receive training on topics like bullying prevention, trauma-informed care, identifying warning signs, etc.? Are there opportunities for families and community members to participate in any of this training? How do active shooter drills work at our school and are any drills planned for this school year that would involve students? How will you be communicating with families when an active shooter drill is scheduled? How do you accommodate students who could be traumatized by such drills?*
- **Emergency Operations Plan.** *Is there an Emergency Operations Plan (EOP) for the school? In what ways do families participate in this plan? Will the EOP be shared with families at the beginning of the school year? When will families have an opportunity to provide feedback on the plan?*
- **Recovery.** *What is the protocol for supporting staff and students after a school safety incident? Who are the personnel in the building who provide support to traumatized or grieving students? What channels can students and staff use to seek out more support?*
- **School Building.** *What physical security measures are in place to promote school safety without undermining the school environment or causing psychological harm?*
- **After/Outside School.** *What programs are in place—or special measures taken—to keep kids safe in route to school, during summers, after school and in extracurricular activities outside of school?*

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- **Staffing.** *Which staff in the school building spend the most time developing school safety plans? Which staff in the building help students who exhibit concerning behavior? What are their caseloads? What is the protocol for referring students to external resources and staff?*
- **Data.** *Do you have any data you can share on safety at our school? Do you have any data you can share on the social and emotional well-being of students and educators at the school?*
- **Budget.** *In what ways does the school budget invest in school safety? Can you walk us through the line items in this year's budget that you think contribute to school safety? Will there be an opportunity for families to give feedback on next year's budget? If you had limitless funding, what else would you spend money on to augment your programming? How can we and other families help you secure this funding?*
- **Thank You & Next Steps.**

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Resources

Below are examples of available tools and resources for parent leaders and principals to use when working on school safety issues.

- [20 Questions Every Parent Should Ask \(National PTA\)](#): Sample questions parents can ask school employees about school safety.
- [National PTA Advocacy Toolkit - Meeting with Decision Makers](#): Guidance for parents who want to meet with decision makers in their schools.
- [Principals Recovery Network & Guide to Recovery \(National Association of Secondary School Principals\)](#): Resources for principals to help their school communities recover after an incident of school gun violence.
- [Position on Safe Schools](#): Learn about the National Association of Secondary School Principal's position on Safe Schools.
- [Greenlights Grants Initiative](#) and [SAMHSA Grants Webinar](#): Resources for helping schools secure school safety grant funding.
- [School Employee Mental and Social Emotional Health resources](#): Resources for promoting the mental and social emotional health of school employees.
- [U.S. Department of Education Resource for School Administrators on Importance of Safe Firearm Storage](#): Resources from the U.S. Department of Education for principals and district leaders to assist in their work with families and communities around safe firearm storage.

Checklist for Working with Principals on School Safety

- Review** publicly available school safety information (see Blueprint Step 1).
- Develop** a long-term, trust-based relationship with your principal (see Blueprint Step 1).
- Schedule** a meeting with your principal (see Blueprint Step 2).
- Draft and send** an agenda in advance of the meeting (see Blueprint Step 2).
- Assemble** a list of school safety related questions, concerns and requests (see Blueprint Step 2). If helpful, use the resources listed above.
- Meet** with your principal (see Blueprint Step 3 and [PTA's helpful tool](#)).
- Commit** to next steps with your principal (see Blueprint Step 3).