



Kentucky Center for School Safety
Assessment Report
For
Spencer County Middle School
October 29, 2015

Disclaimer:

This assessment represents a one-day snapshot of **Spencer County Middle School (SCMS)** that may or may not be the total depiction of what occurs daily. The team based its findings on the data provided and individual observations made during this one-day time frame. Please be mindful that this assessment **is not binding** but is merely an independent review to assist school officials in their quest to examine practices and procedures in an attempt to better serve their student population. It is therefore incumbent upon school district officials and school staff to consider the team's report and determine what they believe is legitimate and critical to address when considering school safety management issues.

Process:

This report is based on the following information:

1. Review of the school website
2. Observed supervision practices and procedures
3. A physical plant walk-through
4. Results of a safe schools survey for students, staff and parents
5. Interviews with students, staff and parents

Introduction:

The team was welcomed to Spencer County Middle School and asked to sign in and receive a visitor's sticker. We were directed to the Library where the interviews were to be conducted. The team would like to thank the Librarian, Ms. Gabbard, and the Library Assistant, Ms. Simpson, who kept the interviews running smoothly throughout the day.

Commendations:

1. **Separate areas for car and bus traffic** – Spencer County Middle School is designed so that cars and buses use different traffic patterns for student transportation. This configuration is a best practice in school safety. By keeping cars and buses in different areas, students are not crossing in front of buses which could create a visibility issue. This also helps alleviate traffic congestion.
2. **Societal Issues** – During the interviews, it was reported that Spencer County Middle School is not plagued with many of the societal issues affecting many schools today. There were no problems reported with theft, drugs, tobacco, alcohol, weapons, fighting, or race relations. One teacher stated, "Overall we have good behaving kids. We don't have the heavy issues other surrounding schools have." And a student when asked about fighting stated, "The teachers stop it before it starts."
3. **Bullying Training** – Staff and students report that there have been a variety of methods to help alleviate instances of bullying and harassment. SCMS has initiated the S.T.O.P. hotline for reporting any instances of bullying. Students and staff attended an assembly with guest speaker Joe Washington who presented timely information on dealing with bullying. Spencer County Middle School also had a parent involvement night early in the year where two of the sessions focused on bullying, its definition, and what to do if it occurs. One student reported, "An on-line survey is sent to the principal and he takes care of it." One teacher stated, "We take bullying seriously, every issue has a response from administrators." A parent stated, "Bullying can be reported to the principal on the Internet." *On the survey report, 77.5% of students, 97.9% of teachers and 85% of parents report that there is a process to report bullying or harassment. (Table 2)*
4. **Building Accessibility** – The design of SCMS is such that visitors must be buzzed in to the building during the school day. This design includes a security vestibule with two sets of doors – the first ones allow persons to enter this vestibule while the second set remains locked. Persons must be buzzed into the office to sign in and receive a visitor's sticker for entrance into the remainder of the building. In the morning, the exterior set of doors are unlocked at 6:30 for students who arrive before supervision begins, but they are not permitted any further than this vestibule until proper supervision is in place. *One teacher reported that the delivery doors in the kitchen are unlocked at times. Consider

monitoring these doors to ensure that this is not occurring as it would undermine all building security.

5. **Positive Culture and Climate** – School culture can be described as the beliefs, attitudes and behaviors that are present in a school. School climate is reflective of the “feel” of the building, either positive or negative. SCMS exhibits a positive culture and climate. Staff and students expressed a positive feeling about the school and all persons appeared to share the same beliefs and attitudes about the importance of maintaining a positive learning environment for the students. The building, although 10 years old, was very clean and positively decorated which exudes pride in the building. Students are instructed in the “7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens.” This program by Sean Covey assists students in maintaining a positive attitude about all issues they face. One staff member stated, “If I could move, I would. I would love for my kids to go here.” Another stated, “My children do go here and we don’t even live out here.”
6. **Communications** – Spencer County Middle School utilizes the One-Call system for parent communications. They also utilize a program for sending group texts and/or emails for school information. This can be extremely important when notification needs to be made for emergency situations.
7. **Administrative follow up for discipline issues** – Staff members stated that the administration handles any discipline issues both swiftly and efficiently. They reported that they receive feedback on these actions on a personal level. One teacher stated, “Mr. Mercer tries to address things quickly.” And a parent reported, “Mr. Mercer is great. He addresses issues quickly and doesn’t let things fester.” *On the survey report, 97.9% of teachers felt that this was true. (Table 8)*
8. **Full-Time Nurse** – Spencer County Schools have collaborated with the county health department to provide a full-time nurse for SCMS. She was reported to be a very positive member of the school community. One staff member stated, “We couldn’t live without her. She helps with both medical and emotional concerns of our students.”
9. **Part-Time SRO** – Spencer County has contracted with two police officers to serve as a SRO for their schools. These two gentlemen rotate days and cover all of the schools. Although most of their time is spent at the high school, it was reported that they are a daily presence at SCMS also. One parent stated, “Dave Jewel is a great guy. He has a great rapport with the students.” *As funds exist, consider providing a full-time SRO for Spencer County Middle School. Several persons interviewed expressed this desire.

10. **Positive Relationship between Staff and Students** – A cornerstone in school safety is a positive relationship between students and staff. In schools where this occurs, safety is enhanced. All students interviewed expressed that they had such a relationship with at least one adult at SCMS. One parent when talking about her son stated, “He would talk to any of the teachers he has had.” A student said, “If I needed help I could go to any teacher here. They would all help me.” *On the survey in Table 8, 84.3% of students reported that they had a trusted adult at SCMS this year.*

11. **Perception of Safety** – In his Hierarchy of Needs theory, Abraham Maslow cites safety as one of our basic needs. He says that this must be fulfilled before a person is able to concentrate on their growth needs, which include academic growth. All persons interviewed at Spencer County Middle School expressed the sentiment of feeling safe at school. One teacher stated, “It’s a community here, people look out for each other and issues are handled quickly.” Another teacher when asked about feeling safe said, “Absolutely, the safest school I have ever taught at. We have a positive environment, students and teachers are happy to be here and we have a good rapport with parents.” *On the survey in Table 1, the vast majority of students, teachers and parents indicated having a secure feeling in all areas of the school this year. In Table 8, 93.5% of students, 97.9% of teachers and 96.4% of parents reported feeling safe at school this year.*

Areas of Mutual Concern and Consideration (issues that were brought to visiting team members’ attention by either surveys or by personal interview)

	Surveys Completed	Interviews Conducted
Staff	48	25
Students	581	103
Parents	251	8
Total	880	136

1. **Supervision** - One of the most common and critical issues affecting school safety is that of active student supervision. This is a proactive approach to monitor students in order to ensure safety and reduce problem behaviors from occurring. Team members observed and were told about areas that were not effectively supervised. In the morning and at lunch, only one staff member was observed supervising the cafeteria. During class changes only one or two of the teachers were observed coming into the halls to supervise during these transitions. One team member stood in the hall outside of the restrooms when students were returning from lunch and observed some boys wrestling in the restroom. As they saw her, they stopped. One student stated, “We need supervision in the bathrooms after lunch.” Another student stated, “They need more teachers on the

balcony upstairs.” And yet another one stated, “More teachers are needed in the bathrooms, especially upstairs.” *On the survey report, 5 areas were reported to need more supervision by more than 19% of the students. (Table 7)*

Considerations:

- Consider reviewing Spencer County Board Policy 9.221 which delineates the requirements for supervision of students.
 - Consider convening a committee to study the issue of student supervision at Spencer County Middle School. This committee should review the present supervision plan to determine ways that the cafeteria, halls during transitions, and the student restrooms can be given improved adult supervision. There is no substitute for ample adult supervision. All school personnel should be reminded that holding students to a strict account for their conduct on school premises is a state mandate under KRS 161.180.
 - Consider obtaining a copy of “Systematic Supervision,” (Iris media) to show during a faculty meeting. This thirty-minute film is an excellent source of information to make staff aware of their responsibilities in supervision and to remind them that the single most effective strategy for making school safe is the physical presence of a responsible adult in the immediate vicinity.
 - Consider examining the difference between “passive supervision” (teachers present but unengaged) and “active supervision” (teachers proximal, engaged, alert). Consider how “active supervision” would look in all areas of the school and setting this as the standard for all SCMS staff members. Administrators should model active supervision so that teachers know what it looks like; then monitor the staff to ensure that proper supervision is occurring.
2. **K.R.S. 158.162** Team members were informed that sections of K.R.S. 158.162 have not been completed this year. They include:
- The principal shall discuss the emergency plan with all school staff prior to the first instructional day of each school year and shall document the time and date of any discussion.
 - Each local board of education shall require the principal in each public school building in its jurisdiction to conduct, at a minimum, emergency response drills to include one (1) severe weather drill, one (1) earthquake drill, and one (1) lockdown drill within the first thirty (30) instructional days of each school year and again during the month of January. Required fire drills shall be conducted according to administrative regulations promulgated by the Department of Housing, Buildings and Construction. Whenever possible, first responders shall be invited to observe emergency response drills.

Although the school has conducted one of each of the emergency response drills, only one fire drill has been completed and regulations require 2 in the first two weeks and one a month after the first two weeks.

Considerations:

- Consider reviewing the school's emergency management plan with the faculty/staff at the next faculty meeting. Going forward, consider conducting this review on the opening day of school for staff members each school year.
 - Consider developing a schedule for each drill and completing them as required.
3. **Inconsistent Use of Staff/Visitor Identification** – An important tenant in school safety is that of all persons in the building being properly identified. When employees wear identification on their persons, this ID signifies that they are an integrated part of the school/district and that they have the authority to access the building and grounds. Additionally, when everyone wears their school identification, a certain bond is created, not only between the schools and its employees, but between staff members themselves. Staff members at SCMS were not seen to be wearing staff identification. It was also observed that several parents who came to be interviewed did not wear the visitor's sticker.

Considerations:

- Considering creating and issuing staff identification for all employees. This could be the picture type or merely a metal name tag. Once a picture ID is agreed upon by staff, consider contacting the school picture company used by the school for student photographs. They will often provide staff photo IDs for free or at a reduced cost.
 - Consider requiring all staff to consistently wear their identification during all school times and events. Alternative identification would be issued to anyone losing or forgetting their ID's.
 - Consider also creating identification to be worn by substitute teachers.
 - Consider requiring ALL visitors to wear identification. Staff should be instructed to approach any visitor without such a sticker and escort them back to the office to ensure that proper sign in procedures have been completed.
4. **Parental Notification for Emergency Response** - With the increased media coverage of school emergencies and issues, parents are quick to react and respond to the school when/if they hear of a potential problem. In the event of an emergency requiring a response by police, fire, EMS, etc., parent response could create a critical traffic issue which would potentially delay this emergency response. By instructing parents about

how they should react upon hearing news of an issue at school, some may follow these instructions and wait for the proper communications. The additional benefits of the notification concerning response/release are to lessen the confusion/panic of an unplanned event and to ensure that students are released only to those people who are written on the emergency card. This communication has not been done with the parents from Spencer County Middle School. One parent when asked about this notification stated, “No, this is one area they could do a better job at.” *On the survey report, 37% of parents advised that they had not been instructed as to what to do if there were any emergency at the school. (Table 8)*

Considerations:

- Consider creating a parent communication letter/brochure that would instruct parents as to how they would receive information during an emergency at SCMS. This communication should not include the specifics about the school’s emergency plan and procedures, but should assure them that they will be given timely instructions about where and how to reunite with their children.
 - Consider distributing this communication to all parents, including it on the school’s website and reviewing it at any parent meeting.
5. **Suicide Prevention Training** – KRS 158.070 requires that all certified staff in middle and high school receive a minimum of 2 hours of suicide prevention training each school year. Although the statute does not state when this is to be done for staff, best practice indicates that it be done before school starts each year. KRS 156.095 states the following: “By September 1, 2010, and September 1 of each year thereafter, every public middle and high school administrator shall disseminate suicide prevention awareness information to all middle and high school students. The information may be obtained from the Cabinet for Health and Family Services or from a commercially developed suicide prevention training program.” Most students interviewed stated that they had not received this training. *On the survey report 84.8% of students and 52.1% of teachers report they have not received suicide prevention training this year. (Table 2)*

Considerations:

- Consider utilizing the information about suicide prevention training found on the Kentucky Center for School Safety’s webpage: <https://www.kycss.org/suicide>.
- Consider examining how and when suicide prevention information is to be disseminated to students each year. Some schools have dedicated an extended homeroom period at the beginning of each year to complete this requirement. Best practice in school safety indicates that discussion should follow any flyer, etc. that is distributed.
- Consider contacting the Cabinet for Health and Human Services to provide information to be utilized when instructing staff members about suicide prevention.

6. **Lack of Internet Safety Training** – The internet is found to be an integral part of students’ daily lives. Often they become involved in unsafe practices with dire consequences. Schools have become the most consistent place for computer and Internet instruction. Students at Spencer County Middle School reported that they have not consistently received any instruction on Internet safety. One student reported, “Cyber-bullying happens more than bullying at school.” *On the survey report 56.5% of students reported that they have not received any Internet Safety training at school this year.* (Table 2)

Considerations:

- Consider including Internet Safety training in library instruction or computer classes.
- Consider contacting the Kentucky State Police for an assembly on Internet Safety.

Special Note: There were discrepancies between the survey and interview responses on the issue noted below. Please consider further examination of these matters with the appropriate groups to determine if there is an appreciable level of concern among stakeholders.

1. **Bus Issues** – *On the survey in Table 9, students reported a variety of behavioral issues on the buses.* During the interviews, the students and staff reported that there were very few issues on the bus.

Other Concerns: Many persons interviewed expressed concern with the number of windows in the school. One staff member stated, “There are too many windows in the building. While they are beautiful, the students were scared right after Sandy Hook and they wanted them covered.” Another stated, “We cover our interior windows with curtains to be safe from intruders.” The concern over windows was spoken of frequently during the interviews. Consider discussing with staff methods that could be used to limit visibility into their classrooms.

Next Steps:

1. It is recommended that this report be shared in its entirety with school staff and discussed in a faculty meeting.
2. It is also recommended that the SBDM Council, Family Resource Center staff as well as appropriate district staff have access to this report.
3. It is recommended that once the faculty and staff have reviewed the report, pressing issues should be identified, prioritized and an appropriate action plan implemented. As funds become available, the team leader for your assessment can be made available to assist you with this process upon request.
4. If the leadership of the district and/or the school wishes to have any follow-up assistance, please feel free to contact the Kentucky Center for School Safety. These efforts in the majority of instances can be provided at no cost to the school or district.