

Fully Secured Entrances for Elementary and Middle Schools

In June 2022, a man/intruder tried to enter an elementary school in Alabama. This man, who also attempted to take a resource officer's gun, attempted multiple times to enter the elementary school where students were inside. However, due to ALL the doors providing access to the school being LOCKED, the man was unable to gain access. The district superintendent credits being able to keep the intruder out of the elementary school, thereby keeping the children and staff inside safe, to the fact that "the district has always had a practice of locking all exterior and interior doors." (Source: <https://www.cnn.com/2022/06/09/us/alabama-elementary-school-man-killed/index.html>)

Now, please think about our current elementary and middle school building entrances, which are currently unlocked during school hours (with the idea being that visitors, and intruders alike, would politely reroute themselves through the unlocked office to sign in before entering through the next unlocked door providing access to the entire school). Contemplate the outcome of this scenario, or any similar scenario, if it were to occur in Tahoma School District schools without fully secured entrances and campuses. Unfortunately, the current set up provides very easy access for anyone- visitor or intruder- to access our elementary and middle schools, posing great safety risks to our students, teachers, and staff.

Current Situation

- Elementary and Middle schools **do not have a fully secure and locked front entrance**, and therefore do not have a fully secured building. Front doors remain unlocked, rerouting through an unlocked office door, with subsequent entry through an unlocked door providing access to the entire school. Only high school has a buzz locked entry.
- TSD does not have a policy that requires the locked buzz entry security feature at the high school to remain in use at all times during school hours. This allows use of the high school locked buzz entry to be used at the discretion of the principal, with the **ability to disable the security feature** at his/her discretion.
- Per TSD School Board Policy 3203, Inclusion, Diversity, and Equity, "The Tahoma School District believes that our schools must be [...] safe [...] for every student and every adult [...to ensure] all students have what they need to learn and thrive." Currently, in respect to the safety and security of school campuses, the **Tahoma School District is in violation of policy 3203**, as only the high school provides the ability for a fully secured locked front entrance and ultimately fully secured building, leaving elementary and middle schools unsecured.

Changes Needed

1. **ALL schools** in the TSD, including elementary and middle schools, **need to have a fully secured locked buzz entrance**.
2. A **district wide policy** needs to be in place that requires **all locked buzz entries to remain locked at all times** during school hours at ALL TSD buildings. This policy also should require ALL exterior doors to remain locked at ALL times during school hours. No teachers, staff, principals, or otherwise should be permitted to disengage these security features or prop doors open.

Why These Changes Need To Happen

- Secured locked buzz entrance **provides a safe and secure building**. It can **prevent and even discourage intruders from entering** and harming students, staff, and teachers. It provides a safe and secure working and office environment for office staff and visitors. When students feel safe and secure at school, their **learning is enhanced**. Likewise, teachers can focus more on teaching. Secured locked buzz entrance at every TSD school **provides an equitable safe, learning environment**. Unlocked entrances leave students, teachers, and staff vulnerable and unprotected. Unlocked doors create an inequitable experience, as students, teachers, and staff in unlocked schools are not provided the same secure learning environment as students inside a fully locked building.

- Secured locked buzz entrance is **a standard across schools** in America today. A policy requiring this safety feature to be in place at all times during school hours will **prevent the unnecessary vulnerability and risk of harm** to students, teachers, and staff due to an individual (principal, district administration, teacher, staff) deciding to disable the security feature at any given time.
- Per **TSD School Board Policy 4311**, School Board School Safety and Security Services Program, “The purpose of the Tahoma School District safety and security services program is to improve school safety and the educational climate at the school.[... and help] to promote a safe, inclusive and positive learning environment.” The Safety Committee then has the **responsibility and obligation to identify, discuss, and approve** to submit the requests for necessary updated changes needed to provide the safest environment possible in an evolving climate where school violence is increasing at an alarming rate. Likewise, the Tahoma School Board has the **responsibility and obligation to approve the necessary changes** and updates needed to provide the crucial foundational safety layers at our school buildings and campuses.
- Per **TSD School Board Policy 3203**, Inclusion, Diversity, and Equity, “The Tahoma School District believes that our schools must be [...] safe [...] for every student and every adult [...to ensure] all students have what they need to learn and thrive.” Providing locked buzz entry for elementary and middle schools **ensures equity for all students**, no matter their age or grade, **to be provided a fully locked, safe and secure campus and entrance**.
- **TSD has the budget for these critical and necessary one-time investments** increasing the safety of each and every student, such as \$5,000 per key pad entry to a portable door and the cost of installing locked buzz entry at the elementary and middle schools. **Our students’ lives are priceless and worth these one-time investments**. TSD received **over \$16,000 per enrolled student** for the 2021-2022 school year. At the end of 2021-2022 school year, the TSD had **over \$24 million dollars in its general unassigned fund balance**. The **Associated Student Body Fund had over \$1.8 million allotted** for the 2021-2022 year, and will likely have similar for the upcoming budget. With the dramatic housing price increases, the district can also expect to have an **increased general funds budget** through the funds provided by local property taxes alone. (source: <https://www.k12.wa.us/policy-funding/school-apportionment/safs-report-api>)
- Approving and implementing critical and necessary safety features will **help to retain valuable educators and maintain a full staff**. Failing to implement these crucial safety layers can result in the loss of experienced staff and educators and staffing shortages, as educators and staff leave their jobs due to feeling unsafe with inadequate safety measures in place. Likewise, implementing these critical and necessary safety features will **help to maintain and increase student enrollment**, as students and parents will feel safe sending their children to school. Failing to implement these crucial safety layers will result in a decline in student enrollment, as parents and students realize the district is inadequately addressing the safety needs of today’s schools and will pursue safer education options elsewhere outside the district.

Supporting Evidence

- The safety needs for today’s schools have evolved. United States **school shootings reached a 20 year high** in 2021 with 93 school shootings, which was surpassed again in 2022 with 95 shootings occurring on school grounds. (sources: <https://www.cnn.com/2022/06/29/us/texas-iowa-school-safety-funding/index.html> ; <https://everytownresearch.org/maps/gunfire-on-school-grounds/>). The CNN article also clearly states that school shootings are happening more across ALL grade levels, as “fewer than half of schools that had shootings were high schools.” This means that our **elementary and middle schools have increasingly become targets** of violence.
- Here in WA, **high capacity magazine sales peaked with record sales** during June, including locally, for example in Covington. (sources: <https://komonews.com/news/local/gun-owners-load-up-on-high-capacity-magazines-make-record-purchases-before-wa-ban-starts> and <https://komonews.com/news/local/gun-stores-seeing-record-sales-as-washington-state-prepares-to-enact-new-gun-laws>)
- The TSD has received **safety threats specific to gun violence**, and even specifically targeting an elementary school during the 2021-2022 school year. Regarding the 3/17/22 gun violence school shooting threat to Rock

Creek Elementary, in a verbal conversation, Maple Valley Police Department Chief Collins stated that the perpetrator's threats were deemed non-credible "at the time", but that did not exclude the possibility that any future threats from this local perpetrator could be credible at a later time.

- Locally, Maple Valley Police Department on several occasions has alerted the public of **increasing crime in our community**, providing instruction to the public on how to prevent crimes of opportunity (i.e. always locking doors to cars and homes, leaving porch lights on). The department even states that "the lack of precautions equal crimes of opportunity". (source: Maple Valley Police Department Facebook posts dated May 24, 2022 and June 29, 2022)