

Communication 2324C-01 from K12 Civic Action Team on Guidelines for Communication After Traumatic Events

From: K12 Civic Action Team

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To: spatesjm@milwaukee.k12.wi.us; governance@milwaukee.k12.wi.us

Subject: Recommendations for Updated Guidelines for Responsive and Consistent School Community Communication

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Milwaukee School Board of Directors

5225 W. Vliet Street

Milwaukee, WI 53208

Subject: Recommendations for Updated Guidelines for Responsive and Consistent School Community Communication

Dear Members of the Milwaukee School Board of Directors,

We hope this letter finds you in good health and high spirits. As concerned members of the community and passionate advocates for the well-being of our students, per Board Governance 2.11(b), the K12 Civic Action Team is writing to propose new policies and guidelines be created and provided to school leaders and staff to appropriately address and communicate information with all stakeholder groups in times of crisis. After gathering input from students, teachers, school leaders and central office staff, we have outlined our recommendations below.

Recommendation: Updated Guidelines for Responsive and Consistent School Community Communication

Objective:

To ensure that all students receive responsive, trauma-informed, and developmentally appropriate communication in response to traumatic events, the district should provide updated guidelines that inform both district and school-based staff on when and how to communicate directly with students. Building upon the policies already in place, these guidelines should address internal and external events/incidents and define the potential impacts of such events at the individual, classroom, and school community levels.

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Rationale:

Effective communication is essential in supporting students who have experienced traumatic events. Clear and consistent communication helps establish a sense of safety, promotes understanding, and facilitates the healing process. By providing updated guidelines, the district can ensure that all schools are equipped with appropriate strategies for communicating with students in times of crisis, thereby creating a consistent and supportive environment across the district. The district does provide resources to students and staff, but given the growing rise of gun violence in our community, these events are happening more frequently, placing a burden on school administrators to determine how to address each situation. Our recommendation is that the district proactively reviews its current policies, practices and guidelines and update them to ensure consistency and minimize opportunities for additional harm.

Recommendations:

Development of Updated Guidelines:

The district should establish a task force or committee consisting of experts in trauma-informed practices, child development, mental health, and school administration to develop updated guidelines for student communication. This task force should collaborate with school-based staff, parents, and community organizations to gather diverse perspectives and ensure the guidelines reflect the needs of the district's students and families. We recommend ensuring representatives from schools most directly impacted in the past few years be involved in the taskforce as they can best identify where the strengths are in current policies and guidelines, as well as where the greatest gaps are.

Inclusive Guidance for District and School-Based Staff:

The guidelines should provide comprehensive information on when and how to communicate directly with staff, students, families, and in-school community partners in response to traumatic events. These guidelines should not only address the content and tone of communications but also emphasize the importance of appropriate timing for sharing information. Timing is crucial in ensuring that communications are delivered with sensitivity and effectiveness. It should be designed to address both district-wide incidents and events specific to individual schools. The guidance should emphasize the importance of utilizing trauma-informed approaches, taking into account the developmental stage of the students, cultural considerations, and any potential sensitivities or triggers related to the traumatic event. By including specific guidance for each level, the policy ensures that all staff members understand their roles and responsibilities in communicating during crises.

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Definition of Impacts:

The guidelines should define the potential impacts of traumatic events at different levels, including individual, classroom, and school-wide. This will enable educators and staff to recognize and respond appropriately to the diverse ways in which students may be affected. By understanding the specific impacts, such as emotional distress, behavioral changes, or academic challenges, educators can tailor their communication strategies and provide targeted support to students in need.

Consistency and Continuity:

The district should emphasize the importance of consistent and ongoing communication to families and caregivers in the aftermath of traumatic events. Guidelines should outline recommended communication channels, such as emails, robo-calls, text messages, websites, social media, and in-person meetings, and encourage schools to provide regular updates to ensure families are well-informed and have access to necessary resources. This consistency will foster trust, reinforce a sense of community, and support families in navigating the recovery process.

Professional Development and Support:

To effectively implement the updated guidelines, the district should allocate resources for professional development and support for staff. Training sessions and workshops should be provided to educate teachers, counselors, and administrators on trauma-informed communication strategies, active listening skills, and methods for maintaining their own well-being while supporting students. Additionally, the district should establish a system for ongoing feedback, collaboration, and learning from best practices across schools.

Conclusion:

By providing updated guidelines for responsive and consistent student communication in response to traumatic events, the district will ensure that school communities have the resources and support necessary to appropriately respond to and address traumatic events. Open and transparent communication, delivered with sensitivity, will help promote healing, resilience, and a sense of unity within the school community. It will also ensure that all stakeholders receive consistent and well-timed information, enhancing the district's crisis response efforts and supporting the mental well-being of all those involved.

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We urge the Milwaukee School Board of Directors to prioritize the development and implementation of these updated guidelines. Through this proactive approach, we can better support our students, families, and educators, and build stronger schools that are safe, welcoming, well-maintained, and accessible community centers that meet the needs of all.

Thank you for your attention to this crucial matter.

Sincerely,

The K12 Civic Action Team

*The K12 Civic Action team seeks system transformation in Milwaukee to eliminate the disparities and inequities caused by racism and white supremacy in our schools, policies, and local government. Originally convened by The Greater Milwaukee Foundation as the K12 Covid-19 Civic Response Team, we are a diverse partnership of stakeholders seeking to improve educational outcomes and experiences for Milwaukee's Black children, youth and families. We are targeted in our approach of driving towards equity through the centering of lived experiences and focusing on systemic solutions.