

July 8, 2026

Dr. Fred Rundle
Mercer Island School District
4160 86th Avenue SE
Mercer Island, WA 98040

Dear Dr. Rundle and the Mercer Island School District Board,

In November 2025, the Mercer Island School District (District) convened a group of students, staff, parents, community members, and social service agency representatives to focus on concerns related to sexual assault and student safety. The group was named the Student Safety & Well-Being Committee (Committee). As a Committee, we appreciate that the District has been so open to engaging with us around such important but challenging topics.

The scope of the Committee's work included a focus on student safety issues related to sexual misconduct. As such, the Committee work did not address other important student safety issues such as drug/alcohol prevention, firearm safety and bullying. The Committee's work was forward looking and did not include investigating sexual misconduct that may have taken place in the past.

In our first meetings, the Committee engaged in a structured discussion called "Back to the Future," which helped identify areas of interest and envision opportunities for strengthening student safety and well-being in the District.

Many of our recommendations are shaped by the Committee's vision of a District:

- Where students know they are safe and they belong
- Where all students and staff have confidence that policies, procedures, and concerns are addressed fairly, consistently, and in a manner that supports equitable access and opportunity for those who have been historically underrepresented in our District.
- Where there are clear, accessible, trauma-informed, and student-centered policies and procedures
- Where teachers, staff, students, and parents are meaningfully educated on inappropriate behaviors and how to address them
- Where there are clear reporting channels, and reports are taken seriously and concerns are acted upon

We hope our suggestions will further our shared goal of making us a model district in which families feel confident that their students will be safe in school.

Based on the Committee's discussions, we decided to focus on four areas: Students, Professional Boundaries, Reporting/Follow Up, and Student Learning/Staff Training. Subcommittees were created for each of these areas. As of the date of this letter, the full Committee has met eight times. Each of the four subcommittees have met separately at least six times since January 2026.

This report to the District and the Board includes a summary of the observations and recommendations from the Committee and subcommittees. Some of the subcommittee's recommendations overlap so we have provided an overview in the coming pages that harmonizes the recommendations of the various subcommittees.

We appreciate the work of Praesidium, an outside consultant organization known for sexual assault prevention and early intervention. We hope our efforts and recommendations will complement the Praesidium report and assist the District as it considers future priorities and implementation efforts.

There is still work to be done in years to come. And the District will no doubt want to engage with teachers/staff beyond those on our Committee. In the future, the District should also consider engaging students and parents for better representation of all identities, especially those that have historically been targeted and/or underrepresented in our District, so that the impact of diverse lived experiences and more nuanced perspectives can be incorporated.

We recognize that the District has resources constraints and that not all recommendations can be implemented immediately or in the manner envisioned by the Committee. The Committee thanks the District and the School Board for supporting our work. As an advisory group, we hope that you find these recommendations useful, and we hope that the District will sustain this important work in the future. While not a decision-making body, many members are willing to support the implementation and change process, as appropriate.

Sincerely,

The Student Safety & Well-Being Committee

Student Safety & Well-Being Committee

Recommendations to the District and MISD School Board

The subcommittees worked independently and periodically made progress reports to the larger Committee. While there was some overlap in some of the subcommittee recommendations, there was consensus around virtually all of the forward-looking recommendations.

The following represents a consolidated summary from the Committee and subcommittees.

Praesidium Report

At about the same time that the Committee was formed, the District contracted with Praesidium, a nationally recognized risk management firm, to study District practices and identify areas for improvement.

All of the Committee and subcommittee work products and the minutes from all the Committee meetings were shared with Praesidium. The entire Committee met with Praesidium on April 28. Several of the Committee members met with Praesidium at other points during their April 27-29 visits to the District. The Committee received Praesidium's report to the District on June 30, 2026, and, very briefly, we offer the following observations and perspectives.

- The Praesidium Safety Equation framework touches on all of the areas that the Committee addressed and provides a solid foundation for the District.
- The Praesidium report was comprehensive and provides excellent guidance around sexual misconduct prevention including policies, staff training and systems.
- The Committee would like to see the District go beyond what is spelled out in the Praesidium report in the areas of Reporting/Follow Up and Student Learning.

The Committee encourages the District to consider both the Praesidium report as well as the Committee recommendations contained in this report as it develops priorities and implementation of plans for the coming year and in years to come.

Sexual Harassment Policy and Procedures

District Policy 3205 and 3205P defines policies and procedures that prohibit sexual harassment between staff and students. The Policy closely mirrors what is mandated by law and what is recommended by WASA.

The Committee recommends that Board Policy 3205 be reviewed and strengthened with an emphasis on clarity, accessibility, equity, reporting pathways, follow-up expectations, student-centered language, prevention, training, and accountability. The Committee's comments on Procedure 3205P should be preserved as a resource to inform future procedure and implementation work, recognizing that procedures may need to be revised after the Board policy is updated.

The Committee recommendations include:

- Clarifying that sexual relationships between staff and students are not allowable under any circumstances and are grounds for immediate dismissal.
- Enhancing reporting channels with a standalone reporting section to help ensure that the staff, students and families understand how and where to report concerns. The Committee believes that this is the foundation of the entire system. If people do not know how to report, misconduct may never come to light.
- Clarifying the importance of addressing all adult misconduct, including behaviors and boundary violations so that conduct can be addressed before it escalates.
- Setting out clear consequences for staff who fail to report or who retaliate against reporters.
- Balancing privacy protections with investigation and safety obligations which are essential for victim protection, effective investigations, and community safety and confidence.
- Creating specialized investigation procedures or protocols and supports for allegations involving staff working with significantly disabled students.
- Clarifying that investigations continue, as much as practical, despite resignation, retirement, surrender of certification, or non-participation.

The subcommittee spent considerable time making recommendations for the District to consider. The subcommittee's marked-up copy of District Policy 3205 and 3205P can be found in the Appendix.

Maintaining Professional Staff/Student Boundaries Policies and Procedures

District Policy 5253 defines policies and procedures that provide guidance around maintaining professional staff and student boundaries. The Policy and associated procedures were last updated in January 2017, and the Committee believes that both the policy and procedures should be updated. As the District considers an update to the policy and procedures, it should consider:

- Explicitly naming and addressing grooming behaviors and using consistent terminology throughout the documents.
- Ensuring clear reporting timelines and reporting pathways.
- Strengthening reporting standards to encourage reporting based on reasonable concerns or questions rather than requiring certainty and clarifying reporting obligations for all staff.
- Clarifying allowed physical conduct standards, including whether consent should be required for any non-emergency contact.
- Establishing clear standards for private meetings with students.
- Updating electronic communication/social media rules for staff-student communications to account for newer technologies.
- Strengthening complaint tracking and pattern detection and adding annual aggregate reporting consistent with privacy requirements.
- Updating and strengthening training requirements for all personnel categories, and regularly educating students and the larger community on what constitutes a boundary violation and how to report it.
- Addressing the blurred lines and potential risks and conflicts created by outside business/tutoring/coaching and other conflict-of-interest relationships.

Student Learning and Staff Training

The subcommittee found that student safety and well-being cannot depend on one class, one curriculum unit, one annual training, or one isolated initiative. While significant and thoughtful work is already underway across the District through Health classes, counseling supports, MIYFS partnerships, staff training, student clubs, and classroom conversations, these efforts are not yet sufficiently connected to create the consistent, visible, and trusted system of support that students need.

The full subcommittee report on Student Learning and Staff Training is attached for further review. Key themes from that report include:

- strengthening the District’s K–12 approach to student learning related to safety, healthy relationships, consent, reporting, and help-seeking.
- clarifying that Health classes are an essential part of this work but cannot carry it alone.
- strengthening peer support systems, trusted adult pathways, and staff preparation
- engaging families and community partners more intentionally.
- creating school-based implementation teams of students, faculty, staff, and leaders to determine how these recommendations can be carried forward within each school community.
- providing greater district support to update and coordinate K–12 Health curriculum, especially in the area of Sexual Health.
- training should include role-specific guidance for substitutes, mid-year hires, part-time or occasional staff, and staff working with students with IEPs and 504 plans. Training should also address equity, power dynamics, cultural responsiveness, bias, assumptions about credibility, mandatory reporting, coordination with external agencies, and consistent follow-up expectations.

Student Advocate Role

In reviewing how the most serious allegations of sexual misconduct are handled, the Reporting and Follow-Up subcommittee noted that staff often received support from their union and/or the District, but the students and families lacked adequate support to navigate the difficult and potentially re-traumatizing process of reporting and investigation within an institutional setting.

The District, under its existing Interlocal Agreement with YFS, has access to YFS school-based mental health professionals who could serve the proposed ‘student advocate’ role as part of their existing duties with appropriate training. If leveraged, MIYFS and the District could provide trauma-informed and culturally appropriate support to the student and their family throughout district disclosure, discovery and investigation process. The process may ultimately extend beyond the district into the legal or other domains.

The Student Advocate role should be clearly defined as supportive rather than investigative. The advocate may help students understand what to expect, navigate communication from the school or District, access counseling, academic supports, safety planning, and other resources, and remain supported throughout the follow-up process.

The role should be designed to reduce barriers and support equitable access for students and families. The advocate should not serve as a reporting channel, conduct or participate in investigations, determine findings or outcomes, or replace administrators, investigators, or Title IX personnel.

The subcommittee worked with MIYFS and King County Sexual Assault Resource Center (KCSARC) to draft a recommendation around the Student Advocate role. For additional context on this recommendation refer to the Student Advocate writeup in the Appendix.

Trusted Networks and Peer Mentoring

The student survey and discussions at Committee and subcommittee meetings indicated that many times students didn't know who to turn to if they felt vulnerable to a potential misconduct or had a complaint.

Trusted adults and peer support structures should strengthen student connection and help-seeking, but they should not replace formal reporting pathways, mandatory reporting obligations, or adult responsibility for student safety.

The Committee learned about "trusted networks" programs such as the Teal Ribbon Project at West Seattle High School. Also mentioned was a student peer network program, like the "Bridges" program that used to exist at MIHS. Bridges recruited and trained senior students to engage with the younger students around safe behaviors, boundaries, etc. The Committee recommends that the District consider implementing "trusted network" programs.

Reporting Pathways & System Clarity

Multiple subcommittees identified that students do not consistently understand how or where to report concerns, or what to expect after they report.

The Committee recommends that the District:

- Create a clear, student-centered reporting system with consistent expectations, accessible pathways (including anonymous reporting), and a student-facing explanation of how the process works.
- Establish consistent expectations for documentation and follow-up, including clear communications, coordinated responses, attention to student well-being, and protection from retaliation.
- Reporting pathways should be clear, accessible, culturally responsive, and available in students' and families' preferred languages so that all students and families understand how to report concerns and what to expect after a report is

made. The District should recognize that barriers to reporting and follow-up may not be experienced equally and should design systems that are equitable and responsive to students who may face additional barriers related to disability, language, culture, race, identity, sexual orientation, gender identity, or prior experiences with institutional systems.

- The District should develop, in collaboration with students, a student-facing reporting flow chart, that clearly explains reporting options, what happens after a report is made, and how follow-up may occur.

Staff Training & Role Clarity

The Committee found that staff training and understanding of roles are not always aligned. This appears to be the case for current staff but especially for substitutes, mid-year hires, and specialized staff.

We recommend that the District standardize training and clarify roles for all staff as well as part-time or occasional staff. Focus should be placed on a shared understanding of mandatory reporting, professional boundaries, and how to respond to student concerns in a consistent and accountable way.

Parent Education

In our review of learning/training materials for students and staff, the Committee discussed the need to include parents as part of the Student Safety agenda. While staff training and student learning should remain a priority, parent education could be improved as well.

At the minimum, we believe the District should educate parents around boundaries that are part of District policy. In addition, parents should know the various ways that they can report incidents or concerns for District investigation. A comprehensive communication plan is needed to ensure that all parents have access to District policy and understand what is prohibited, how to report and what they can expect in the way of feedback on their reported incidents.

Committee members emphasized the importance of reaching parents that may have different cultural norms and/or those where English is a second language or not spoken at all by parents.

Parent education and partnership exemplify the need for assistance by the PTA, boosters, and other formal and informal parent groups.

Coaches, Tutors, College Counselors

The District hires teachers, staff, and coaches that may have relationships with students outside of the District managed school setting. Examples include:

- District coaches who also coach District students on club teams or provide individualized training to District students.
- District teachers and staff who offer private academic tutoring or college counseling services to District students.
- District staff with children of their own in the schools and who are likely to interact with District students in their roles as parents and chaperones.

As previously mentioned, these roles can cause blurred lines in staff-student interactions and may need additional regulation or training.

The Praesidium report touches on these challenges, especially in athletics, and their recommendations are a good starting point for improvements.

The Committee is encouraged by the District's recent efforts to work with local student athletic organizations to develop policies and practices that closely mirror those of the District. This work should continue into the next school year.

Accountability and Transparency

The Committee and subcommittees frequently touched on the need for transparency and accountability. Time constraints made it difficult to make much progress on this topic but Committee members felt this was an important topic for future Committees and the District to address.

Topic areas may include:

- What does it mean to be transparent? How can we define accountability?
- How do we move forward with each?
- What kind of monitoring systems need to be put in place? Which current systems need to be improved?
- What does success look like? How will the District measure?
- The role transparency plays in building community confidence in the District's handling of reports.
- How undue secrecy may harm the community at large and may allow perpetrators to continue to harm students in non-District settings.
- How to ensure victim privacy while also building a culture of safety, transparency, and accountability.

Establishing a “Culture of Safety”

Building a “culture” can take years. The Committee fully supports establishing a “Culture of Safety” at Mercer Island School District.

To establish a culture of safety, policy and procedure frameworks must be consistently followed. When systems break down or are determined to be vulnerable, corrective action must be taken promptly. In this case, the District administration cannot do it alone. Teachers, staff, students, coaches, tutors, counselors, and parents all play a role in building, improving and protecting the culture.

A culture of reporting is best achieved when students, staff, and parents know when to report, what to report, how to report, and why to report. These conditions are often contingent upon the reporter feeling heard and confident their report will not only be taken seriously but acted upon and followed up on. Students, staff, and parents will need additional and ongoing training.

Appendix

- List of Committee Members (including social service agencies)
- Back to the Future Exercise – Desired State for Student Safety in MISD
- Policy & Procedure Markups
- Student Advocacy Proposal
- Detailed Subcommittee Recommendations.