

Superintendent Matthews, Commissioners of the Board of Education, and SFUSD Administrators,

We are writing to you to express our concerns around student safety at SFUSD schools. Over the past two weeks, many students have bravely come forward with their experiences of sexual assault, harassment, and violence. After a lack of transparency and action by school administrators, SFUSD staff, and adult “allies,” student walkouts have taken place at high schools around San Francisco. As student leaders, we echo the frustration that many students feel towards the systems intended to keep us safe. This issue is District-wide, and needs immediate action from the SFUSD Administration and the Board of Education.

First and foremost, we stand with survivors who have come forward with their experiences. We amplify and support the demands by students at SOTA, Lowell, and numerous other SFUSD schools:

1. Protect and create effective support systems for victims of sexual assault and harassment, even if abuse occurred off site;
2. Increase transparency about the Title IX reporting process;
3. Provide students with more physical and mental support, especially during the documenting process to not re-traumatize the victim;
 - a. For example, taking a student’s statement instead of having them write a report. And, not forcing victims to sit face-to-face with their attacker in a so-called “restorative justice” practice;
4. Avoid and condemn victim blaming;
 - a. According to Safer Schools Sexual Assault Task Force Report and Recommendations file it states “ In developing these recommendations, the Task Force recognized that prevention work in this area needs to be sensitive to a variety of issues including:
 - i. avoiding victim-blaming which occurs when we place responsibility for stopping sexual assault on the shoulders of those who are victimized; and
 - ii. avoiding thinking of sexual assault as the result of a communication breakdown rather than understanding it as an act of power abuse and a criminal violation;”
5. Prioritize and validate student voice when sharing incident(s) of sexual assault/harassment without demanding physical violence;
6. Mandate that school sites transfer assaulters out of any classes and/or extracurricular activities with their victims. Ensure that responsibility does not fall upon the survivor to avoid their assaulter;
7. Hold attackers accountable for trying to contact survivors after the incident, including but not limited to not allowing them to participate on sports teams and extracurriculars, suspension, or expulsion;
8. Take every report of sexual violence seriously and investigate to the fullest extent that the survivor is comfortable with.

The safety and well-being of young people must be the priority of San Francisco’s schools, and your priority as district staff and leaders. Students do not feel safe in their classrooms, and often do not feel comfortable seeking help in this broken process. There are too many instances of survivors being forced to interact with their abuser in the classroom, forced to see their abuser in the hallways, and forced to wait for weeks to hear an update on their report. Survivors who have the courage to come forward with their experiences should be taken seriously, promptly assisted, and frequently updated.

November 16, 2021

We urge you all to review policies and procedures for students reporting sexual harassment or assault, create support systems for victims at school, work with school sites to provide adequate counselors, ensure every case is heard and reviewed in a timely manner, and work with youth on how best to end sexual violence in our schools.

If you believe in the safety and well-being of SFUSD students, we implore you to take action. This is an urgent matter that demands an immediate, District-wide response.

Sincerely,

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Titles are for identification purposes only.