

School Board Simulation on Safe Schools

Overview

Students will explore how decisions regarding their school are made and examine how their role as active citizens can change the climate of their school by participating in a School Board simulation on improving safety in schools. Students will culminate this activity by creating their own School Safety Improvement Plan.

Grades

Middle & High School

Materials

- Cardinal City Schools news release, attached
- Summary of School Safety Proposals, attached
- Instructions for School Board Members, attached
- Instructions for Special Interest Groups, attached
- How to write and edit a business letter on policy change, attached

Duration

60-90 minutes

Procedure

Safe Schools?

1. As a warm up, ask students to think silently about a safe school and its attributes. You may want to have them jot down some thoughts, then discuss out loud. List student responses on the board or on chart paper. Encourage further thought by asking questions such as:
 - What does it mean to be “safe”? (Encourage discussion of physical and emotional safety.)
 - What are the characteristics of a school that is safe?
 - What does it look like?
 - What are students like at a safe school? How do they behave, act, think, or appear?
 - What are teachers and staff like? How do they behave, act, think, or appear?
 - How would it feel to be part of a safe school community?
 - Why is safety important at school?
2. Reviewing the list, focus the discussion on your particular school community by asking:
 - What makes some schools safe and others unsafe?
 - Why do you think some students choose to participate in unsafe behaviors, or purposely make others feel unsafe (i.e. teasing, bullying, etc.)? Does this type of unsafe behavior occur in our school? Explain.
 - Who do you think is most affected by an unsafe school and why?
 - What should our school do to address unsafe behaviors and safety issues in general?
 - What can you personally do to make our school safer?

- Ultimately, whose responsibility is it to ensure safety in our school?
 - What is government’s role in ensuring safe schools?
- Teacher note: Throughout the discussion, make sure that students discuss safety not just in terms of violence, but also in terms of emotional safety (i.e., bullying, cyber-bullying, gossiping, cliques, teasing, etc. can make a school just as unsafe.)
3. Project the attached fictional news release from the superintendent of schools. Have a student volunteer read it out loud and discuss:
 - Before we discuss the content of this release, tell me what you already know about local governments role and responsibilities in terms of schools.
 - What is the job of the superintendent?
 - What is the job of a School Board?
 - Why is the work of a School Board particularly relevant to each of you? Given this relevance, how many of you have ever been to a School Board meeting? Why?
 - What information is this news release sharing?
 4. Explain to students that each of them will be playing the role of a citizen living in fictional Cardinal City, NC, whose school system has just received the \$200,000 “Safe Schools” grant as described in the news release. Tell students they will all be attending the next Cardinal City School Board hearing, at which the Board will determine how the money is to be spent.
 5. Divide the class into seven groups of 3-5, depending on the number of students. Explain that one group will represent members of the Board, and the other groups will represent community stakeholders with ideas and proposals on how to spend the grant money.
 6. Hand out the attached “Summary of School Safety Proposals” to each group. All special interest groups receive the same set of instructions, but make sure you tell them which proposal from the “Summary of School Safety Proposals” they will develop and present to the Board. Explain to all groups that they should read the instructions given and follow them closely. For the first 15 minutes of this activity, special interest groups will work to brainstorm and create 3-5 minute proposals to present to the School Board. They should be prepared to convince the Board of why their proposal would be most effective in making Cardinal City Schools safer, and also be prepared to refute other programs as being less effective.
 7. Meanwhile, the students playing School Board members should spend time reviewing the positions of the special interest groups presented in the “Summary of School Safety Proposals,” and discuss their initial reactions of which programs would be most effective in improving safety, and also which programs are most cost effective. School board members will also work on creating 2 follow up questions for each proposal. The follow up questions will be asked after the group’s presentations.
 8. Explain to the groups that the format of the hearing will involve 1-2 members of each special interest group presenting a 3-5 minute persuasive proposal, followed by 1-2 questions from the School Board. Questions should be answered by members of the group who did not present the proposal.

9. Allow groups to begin working, circulating around the room to ensure students are on the right track. Give time warnings throughout their working period.
 10. Once it is time for the hearing to begin, review behavior expectations for being a respectful participant. Have the School Board members sit in the front of the class, facing the presenting groups. In “political character,” the teacher should then call the School Board meeting to order and give a brief opening statement that again explains the purpose of the School Board hearing and its format, or have a member of the “School Board” serve as Chairman and do the same.
 11. Allow the special interest groups to present their Safe Schools proposals, following the procedure outlined above (3-5 minute proposal followed by 2 questions from the School Board).
 12. Once all presentations are finished, bring the hearing to a close* and instruct the School Board members to meet in private and share their final views on which proposals will be funded and for how much. Remind them that the amount can not exceed \$200,000. Explain that they have around 10-15 minutes to complete this task. They should choose one School Board member to present their final decision to the group.
- **Teacher note:** If time permits, you may wish to allow presenting groups to offer a quick, 1 minute summary, rebuttal, or closing statement to the School Board before closing the hearing.
13. While the School Board confers in private, instruct each of the special interest groups to create a poster representing their safety proposal. Posters should contain a slogan, picture, symbol, or graphic, and a message making their proposal clear.
 14. Once the School Board has come to a decision, allow their spokesperson to present it to the class. Have the class give a round of applause for all of their hard work, and debrief by discussing:
 - School Board members, what factors influenced you to make the decision you made?
 - All participants: Regardless of which proposal you presented on, which proposal seemed weakest? Strongest? Why?
 - Are any of these proposals programs that you believe would be beneficial in our school today? Why?
 - Are any of these proposals programs that you believe would be a waste of money? Why?
 - In what ways does our local government’s budget affect our school safety?
 - Would you want to be a School Board member who makes decisions like these? Why or why not?
 - Why is it important that you and your family be informed citizens and stay apprised of the decisions School Board members are considering?
 - How is being an informed, active citizen part of creating a safe school?
 - How is the work of the School Board relevant to each of us?
 - What are appropriate ways to make your opinion known regarding issues of school safety, or any other issue of concern you may have with your school? (Make sure to highlight choices such as writing a letter for policy change, signing up to speak at a Board Hearing, making an organized and mature presentation, etc.)

Optional Culminating Activity

- **Create a Student-Driven School Safety Improvement Plan:**

Explain to students that they will explore and evaluate their own school community, and develop a School Safety Improvement Plan. Each group will present their plan to the class, and, as a whole, the class will compile the best parts of each plan into a final product to implement. Divide students into small groups of 5 or less. Give each group chart paper and the following steps to discuss:

1. **Identify the problems:** Brainstorm a list of unsafe behaviors that are a reality in your classrooms and/or school community.
2. **Evaluate the identified problems:** How are these behaviors affecting individuals and the school as a whole? Why do you think members of our community are making these unsafe choices?
3. **Brainstorm alternatives/solutions to the identified problems:** What are some things our school can do to help improve these identified problems?
 - a. Consider procedures, activities, alternative responses, trainings (student and adult), classroom and school structures, school events, extra curricular options, etc. that can be modified and or implemented to improve school safety. If these require funding, consider how much and how the money could be raised.
 - b. Consider how we get our school community (individual students, teachers/staff, administrators, classrooms as a whole, the school as a whole) to “buy in” to this. What’s in it for them?
4. **Create action items:** Create 3-5 detailed and realistic action items that you will present to the class based on your brainstorming and discussion. Your action items should include who, what, when, where, how, and why. For example:
 - (Who) We will solicit teachers and outside community organizations (what and when) to assist in holding monthly Multicultural/Diversity Evenings, (why) so that students can learn about each others backgrounds and beliefs. (How) Participating in activities, lessons, sharing sessions and pot-luck dinners, our school community will begin to break down misconceptions while learning about the values we share. This will help students replace stereotypes with open minded respect.
5. **Finalize a class action plan:** Choose the 5 top action items to compile into a class action plan. (These serve as a starting point. Other action items will not be forgotten, only tabled.) Brainstorm ways as a class to materialize the action plan. Nominate a student committee to oversee the implementation or assign various responsibilities to students who volunteer. A lot class time to revisit the action plan and other items tabled to discuss progress and ways to continue momentum.
6. **Possible extensions:**
 - **Attend a School Board Hearing**

Based on the student’s School Safety Improvement Plan, or on any student idea similar to the fictitious proposals in this activity, develop an idea and create a presentation to deliver to your School Board on improving school safety.

- **Individual Responsibility**

Examine individual responsibility by reading and discussing “A Cherokee Teaching.” See the Consortiums lesson, “Voices of My Emotions.”

Summary of School Safety Proposals

1. Positive Alternatives to School Suspension (PASS)

PASS is a special program for disruptive students. This program provides a special classroom at each school for students who are disruptive or who have been involved in violent behavior. A teacher and counselor will be specially trained to work closely with these students to improve their attitude, behavior, and study skills. Special attention will be paid to students with learning problems. If necessary, counseling services may be extended to families of these students. **Cost: \$120,000**

2. Abercrombie and Fred

A & F are a company who specializes in school uniform distribution. They are proposing a program in which all elementary and middle school students will be required to wear school uniforms unless parents opt out of the program. Each school will select its own uniform. Since families will purchase the uniforms, the cost of this program will be low. However, the program will need some funds to provide assistance to families who cannot afford to buy uniforms. **Cost: \$20,000**

3. Locks and Lasers

Locks and Lasers is a local security company, who is proposing increased security equipment and personnel. Their plan provides metal detectors and hallway surveillance cameras on each middle and high school campus. One new security guard will be hired at each school to help staff the equipment. **Cost: \$160,000**

4. New Beginnings

New Beginnings is a conflict resolution program. New Beginnings will train high school and middle school teachers in conflict resolution skills, which they will teach in various classes. Each middle and high school will develop a peer mediation program with New Beginning's assistance, in which students learn how to settle disputes among students. These peer mediators will also travel to elementary schools and train students in conflict resolution along with a New Beginnings facilitator. **Cost \$67,000**

5. School Patrol

School Patrol is proposing a plan that trains and pays for five full-time security officers to patrol the streets around schools in Cardinal City. These officers will patrol weekdays from 7 a.m. to 4 p.m. They will protect students traveling to and from school. These officers will also assist Cardinal school security officers with problems on the school grounds and keep in radio contact with the Cardinal City Police Department. **Cost: \$140,000**

6. Cardinal City PTA

The Cardinal City PTA is proposing a plan for parent training. This plan will pay for special night classes for parents. The classes will teach effective discipline techniques, how to deal with problem behaviors, and how to help students with school work. There will be classes for parents of students of all ages—from elementary school to high school. **Cost: \$25,000**

Instructions for School Board Members

Today you and your fellow school board members are hearing opinions regarding a \$200,000 grant received by Cardinal City Schools for improving safety. Several groups and programs will testify before you today, presenting proposals of ways they believe school safety can be improved.

Your job:

1. Spend time reviewing the “Summary of School Safety Proposals,” containing descriptions of each of the special interest groups that have signed up to present to you at today’s School Board Hearing. Discuss the proposals, and think about what programs might be more effective than others. Create 2 questions for each group based on the summaries in front of you. You will ask these questions after their presentation to you.
2. Once it is time for the hearing, each group will have 3-5 minutes to present their proposal to you. Listen carefully to their idea, their reasoning, and the amount of money they would require to implement this proposal.
3. After each group, you may ask your 2 follow-up questions to help you make your decision.
4. Once the hearing is complete, you will hold a final meeting with your fellow School Board members and make a decision on which programs you want funded and how much you will award each. Remember, **you cannot exceed \$200,000**. It is advised that you rank the programs according to which will be the most effective in reducing violence at the school. Next, rank them according to which will be the most cost effective. In other words, which will get the most results for each dollar spent? Decide which programs you want funded and how much you will award each. Remember, you cannot exceed \$200,000, but you can partially fund proposals.
5. Finally, elect a spokesperson to present your decisions and your reasoning behind them to the group.

Notes:

Instructions for Special Interest Groups

You represent a special interest group who has a program that you believe can make Cardinal City Schools safer. Today you and your group members will try to convince the Cardinal City Board of Education that they should fund your program with the \$200,000 Safe Schools grant they just received.

Your job:

1. Spend time reviewing the “Summary of School Safety Proposals,” containing descriptions of each of the special interest groups that have signed up to present at today’s School Board Hearing. Your teacher will tell you which proposal you will be developing and presenting between proposals 1-6.

2. Once you have your assigned proposal, as a group begin to brainstorm the presentation you will give to the School Board to convince them to enlist your services and fund your proposal. Consider:

How will your program make the school safer?

Who will benefit from your program, and specifically how will they benefit?

Why is your program better than others on the summary sheet?

Why is your program cost effective? Why is it worth what you are asking for in funds?

How will your program make the school and the community a better place to be?

3. Once you have brainstormed your ideas, develop your thoughts into a proposal (a sales pitch), that you will give to the School Board. Elect 1-2 spokespersons who will deliver your proposal. Remember, your goal is to get the School Board to fund your proposal entirely, above all others.

4. Your entire group should be prepared to answer questions from the Board about your proposal.
Good luck!

Notes:

CARDINAL CITY SCHOOLS



News Release from the Superintendent of Cardinal City Schools

The Cardinal City School Board will hold a public comment session to provide citizens with an opportunity to present ideas on the recently received “Safe Schools Grant.” The grant is in the amount of \$200,000 and must be used for the purpose of making our schools safer, thus more productive.

The citizen comment sessions will be held during the Board’s regularly scheduled meeting on February 1, 2007, which begins at 7 p.m. in the Commissioner’s Meeting Room, 2nd floor, Cardinal City Schools Headquarters, 5000 Main Street.

Citizens who wish to speak must sign up outside the Commissioner’s Meeting Room prior to the meeting between 6:30 p.m. and 7:00 p.m.