Frequently Asked Questions: HSW Incident on 10/27/2026 & SCSD Approach to School Security

(Updated November 13, 2026)

This Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) guide was created to help address questions and/or concerns related to the recent incident at Smithtown High School West as well as the district's approach to school security.

What action(s) were taken by High School West's administrative team to ensure the safety of the students and staff during this incident?

The HSW leadership team did an exemplary job and are to be commended for their swift intervention and strong decision making that led to a safe outcome. The administrative team took the following specific actions to ensure the safety of the students and staff during this incident:

- On Monday, October 26, during an investigation regarding a student altercation, it was reported that there was a picture on social media of a student holding a handgun. Given that the individual had not seen the picture himself, this information was considered hearsay by building administrators and not actionable until the information could be corroborated.
- Given that this information was given at the very end of the school day, the building administrators debriefed and established a clear plan to intercept and detain the student immediately upon arrival the next morning. At that time, the purpose of this detention was to address behaviors exhibited by the student while seeking to corroborate the social media allegation.
- Security intercepted the student upon his arrival to school via an automobile and prior to him entering the building. The student was escorted directly to a designated and secured room inaccessible to other people.
- Administrators ensured the student was never unaccompanied or unsupervised while on school property.
- Administrators began the school day by interviewing individuals regarding the reported incident the day before as well as the alleged social media post. During these interviews, the allegation regarding the social media post was corroborated and it was reported that the picture was not taken at school and there was no connection to school in the post.
- Once the allegation regarding the social media post was corroborated, the student was interviewed by a building administrator about the peer conflict and social media allegation. During this interview, the student was asked if there was anything in the student's book bag that shouldn't be in school. The student admitted to having things that were in violation of the Code of Conduct, but made no mention of having a weapon in the bag and the student did not consent to a search of the book bag. The student was

then informed that the school would be calling a parent to discuss consequences for the student's behavior the day before as well as having items in the book bag that violated the Code of Conduct.

- Administration contacted the student's parent as well as the Suffolk County Police Department (SCPD) 4th Precinct School Resource Officer (SRO) to share reports of the social media post and coordinate an on-site interview with the student and parent. The parent notified the administrator that it may take 2 hours for the parent to arrive at the school.
- Once the student's parent arrived at the school, administrators received the parent's consent for the SRO to question the student regarding the social media posts. Following this interview that was conducted by the SRO, the building administrator made the decision to search the book bag while still in the presence of the SRO and the student's mother. Per the district's Code of Conduct, an authorized school official can search a student's belongings when a student admits to possessing physical evidence that they violated the law or the code.
- During this search, administrators discovered and immediately secured the knife, handgun, and the extended magazine with bullets, which led to the student's immediate arrest.
- At that time, the SRO called the precinct for support and additional SCPD officers arrived shortly thereafter and the student was removed from campus.
- Following the discovery, administration immediately notified district leadership and initiated appropriate disciplinary procedures under the district Code of Conduct.

Does a picture of a minor holding a handgun off of school property allow for a school official to conduct a search of a student and/or their belongings?

No, not unless there is a direct connection to the school environment. Under New York Penal Law (Subdivision 7-e / § 265.20), a minor between 14 and 20 years old may possess and use a pistol or revolver under specific, limited conditions—such as target shooting at an established range, participating in a recognized competition, or under direct supervision.

What is a School Resource Officer (SRO)?

A School Resource Officer (SRO), assigned to the 4th Precinct of the Suffolk County Police Department (SCPD), serves as a sworn law enforcement officer dedicated to crime prevention, emergency planning, safety, and community outreach within the public schools. The SRO's are fully trained police officers who act as a direct line of communication between local school administrators and SCPD command staff at the 4th Precinct. These officers are invaluable assets to our schools and are familiar with our facilities, safety plans, our administrative team, as well as our security detail.

What action was taken against the student involved?

The student was immediately taken into custody and arrested without incident by the SCPD. The district maintains a zero tolerance policy for weapons on school grounds. In addition to the criminal charges, severe consequences are being levied under the district's Code of Conduct, and the individual is strictly prohibited from entering High School West or any district property. Should the individual trespass on our property, the student will be subject to immediate arrest.

Why can't more information be shared regarding the student who brought the weapons to school?

Under federal and state privacy laws, school districts are legally restricted from disclosing specific details regarding individual student disciplinary matters, law enforcement actions, or educational records. While the district understands the desire for complete transparency, these legal obligations prohibit the public release of individualized student information. The district remains committed to sharing all legally permissible information regarding overall safety measures, general timelines, and operational security protocols to keep the school community informed. The primary legal frameworks and considerations that dictate what information can and cannot be shared can be found **HERE**.

Why wasn't a school lockdown or lockout initiated during the investigation?

Lockdowns and lockouts are emergency protocols deployed when an uncontained threat is present in or near a building. In this case, the student was intercepted upon arrival and escorted directly to a secure room where he remained in constant supervision. It was not until a subsequent search that the weapons were discovered in the student's bag.

It is important to note that a person posting a picture of themself holding a weapon off school grounds does not constitute a reason for an emergency protocol to be initiated nor does it provide a legal basis for a search of a person or their property in a school setting.

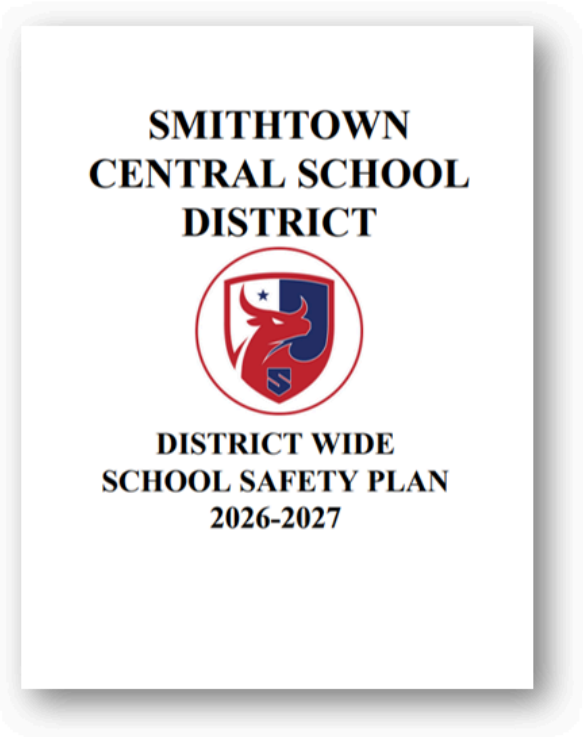
The search was legally permissible due to the student's admission that items strictly forbidden by the Code of Conduct were inside the book bag. During the search, the weapons were found and immediately secured by building administration in the presence of law enforcement and the student was put in custody. Because the weapons were secured and the student was in police custody, there was no active threat to the school community. As such, emergency procedures like a lockout or lockdown were unnecessary. Given that there was already a significant SCPD response to this incident, initiating an unnecessary security protocol would have very likely caused chaos on and around the entire campus.

What safety measures does the district currently have in place to protect our schools?

Over the past decade, Smithtown has nearly doubled its investment in school safety, reflecting our ongoing commitment to protecting students, staff, and visitors. These investments have created multiple layers of security and preparedness, including controlled building access, advanced security technology, armed security personnel at every school, a partnership with Covert Investigations & Security, and ongoing training and emergency preparedness exercises conducted in collaboration with the Suffolk County Police Department and Homeland Security.



While no safety measure can eliminate every risk, these investments are designed to help prevent incidents, strengthen our ability to respond when they occur, and ensure that student safety remains our highest priority.



These efforts are guided by the District-Wide Safety Plan and individual building-level safety plans. The **District-Wide Safety Plan** outlines the district's approach to school safety and security. In addition to the district plan, each school building has a distinct plan that is not available to the public. This is because these plans contain sensitive, tactical information, floor plans, and operational details that could compromise student and staff safety if exposed.

What is the District-Wide Safety Team, and what role does it play regarding this incident?

As required by law, the Board of Education approves our **District-Wide Safety Plan** on an annual basis. This plan has been established to provide for the safety, health and security of both students and staff and allows for input from the entire school community. The plan calls for the Board to appoint, under the direction of the District Superintendent, a District-Wide Safety Team to develop, implement and maintain all provisions of the Plan. This team is comprised of various stakeholders including:

- A Board of Education Trustee
- Central Office Administrators
- Building Level Administrators
- Covert Consultants
- District Security Staff
- PTA Representative
- additionally, Law Enforcement Personnel often attend

The team has many responsibilities, but germane to this incident, it is important to note the following provisions within the District-Wide Safety Plan:

- The District-Wide Safety Team will act as a Threat Assessment Team with the responsibility to assess the vulnerability of the District to violence and recommend to the District Superintendent and Board preventive actions that they feel are necessary.

- In the aftermath of an incident, the District-Wide Safety Team is responsible for auditing the District-Wide Safety Plan to determine its success in violence prevention. Each incident will be reported to and evaluated by members of the District-Wide Safety Team. Furthermore, after the incident has occurred the Threat Assessment Team will conduct a detailed investigation. It is the purpose of the Team to focus on facts that may prevent recurrence, not find fault. The Team conducting the investigation will:

    - Collect facts on how the incident occurred.
    - Record information.
    - Identify contributing causes.
    - Recommend corrective action.
    - Encourage appropriate follow-up.
    - Consider changes in controls, policy and procedures.

The team will convene on November 9 in order to begin this important work. At the conclusion of its inquiry, the District-Wide Safety Team will present its findings to the Superintendent and Board of Education. Once that occurs, the district will share this information to the extent it is legally permissible and doesn't compromise student and staff safety.

Is the District-Wide Safety Team meeting open to the public?

The meeting is not open to the public due to the sensitive nature of the information that is shared. Similar to our Building Level Safety Plans, this meeting will likely include sensitive, tactical information, floor plans, and operational details that could compromise student and staff safety if exposed.

Why did it take so long for parents to be notified on the day of the incident?

When an incident occurs, our first responsibility is to ensure the safety and well-being of students and staff and to work closely with law enforcement and other authorities involved in the response. Once the immediate situation has been addressed, our goal is to communicate with families as quickly as possible.

At the same time, we have a responsibility to ensure that the information we share is accurate and verified. Immediately following an incident like this, facts are often still being gathered, reviewed, and confirmed. While we strive to balance timely communication with factual accuracy, those goals can sometimes be in tension.

In this case, we made the decision to communicate with families at the end of the school day so that parents would be aware of the situation as soon as possible. However, in our effort to provide a timely update, portions of the initial communication were inaccurate or incomplete. Specifically, what was initially described as a peer conflict the previous day was later determined

to be an altercation, and the discovery of a knife was inadvertently omitted from the original notification.

We acknowledge these errors and understand that they may have affected families' confidence in the information that was provided. We take full responsibility for those inaccuracies and omissions. As part of the District-Wide Safety Team's review of this incident, our communication processes will be carefully examined to determine what improvements can be made so that future communications are both timely and as accurate and complete as possible.

We remain committed to keeping our community informed while ensuring that the information we share is factual, verified, and respectful of the legal and privacy considerations that exist in matters involving students.

What resources are available to support students who may feel anxious or upset?

Incidents like this can create anxiety for students and parents alike. The district's counseling staff is available at every school building to provide support and guidance to students needing assistance. Additionally, parents can access the National Association of School Psychologists guide, **Talking to Children About Violence: Tips for Parents and Teachers**, as well as access to our **Mental Health Resources** as found on our district website.

Why did the district choose not to check book bags in the days after the incident?

After the incident and subsequent arrest of this student, there was not a credible threat to the building that would necessitate the need to facilitate a bag check for every student. While we were made aware of rumors related to threats, these were investigated by the district and the Suffolk County Police Department and determined to be non-credible. It is important to note that random bagchecks are not legally permissible and forbidden by our Code of Conduct unless there is reasonable suspicion.

Will the district be installing metal detectors or any other new security measures as a result of the incident?

As outlined in the District-Wide Safety Plan, the District-Wide Safety Team will be tasked with recommending to the District Superintendent and Board any preventive actions that they feel are necessary.

What procedures does Smithtown Central School District follow to verify that newly enrolled students meet the district's residency requirements? Are there circumstances in which the district enrolls students who reside outside its boundaries?

Enrollment in our public schools is based on residency in the District. Board Policy 5150 sets out what a family must show in order for a child to attend school in the District, and those requirements apply the same way to every student who registers. It also indicates the limited situations in which non-resident students may attend District schools. This includes a provision allowing 12th grade students who move on or after February 1 to be permitted to complete their senior year.

Has Smithtown Central School District been asked, encouraged, or required by New York State, Suffolk County, or any other government agency to enroll migrant students who would not otherwise qualify for enrollment based on district residency?

The District does not take part in any program or initiative that enrolls or places migrant students who would not otherwise meet our residency requirements. Suffolk County, New York State, and other agencies have not asked, directed, or required the District to participate in one, and we are not aware of any State program that directs students to be placed in the District. Our enrollment decisions are guided solely by the residency requirements in law and in Board Policy 5150.

Has the district received any additional state or federal funding, grants, reimbursements, or financial incentives specifically associated with enrolling migrant, refugee, or immigrant students? If so, what amounts have been received, under which programs, and how have those funds been allocated?

Like other New York school districts, Smithtown receives State and federal education funding through standard, statewide formulas, most significantly State Foundation Aid. Some funding is also tied to specific, legally defined student needs, such as the number of students learning English or experiencing homelessness. These funding decisions rest on objective criteria and overall enrollment numbers, not on any student's immigration status.

The District does not receive any funding, grant, reimbursement, or financial incentive that is conditioned on, or specifically provided for, enrolling migrant, refugee, or immigrant students as such.

Has the district entered into any formal or informal agreements with state agencies, local governments, or outside organizations regarding the enrollment, placement, or transportation of migrant students?

The District is not a party to any agreement, formal or informal, with any State agency, local government, or outside organization that provides for, directs, or requires the enrollment, placement, or transportation of migrant students into the District.