

# Schenectady City School District



## School Culture and Climate, Safety and Security Screening *What Could Work for SCSD?*

JEFFREY RUSSO

DISTRICT DIRECTOR OF SCHOOL CLIMATE AND SAFETY

EVERYBODY COUNTS. EVERYBODY LEARNS.

# ABOUT US

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## District Vision

Schenectady City Schools will be a continually improving school district dedicated to excellence in teaching and learning, equity, engagement and efficiency.

## District Tagline

Everybody Counts. Everybody Learns.

## Organizational Values

Equity   Collaboration   Learning



EVERYBODY COUNTS. EVERYBODY LEARNS.



# OUR PILLARS

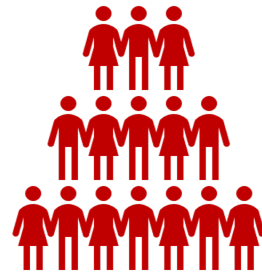


## STUDENT & GRADUATE SUCCESS

We serve so that all students graduate ready to achieve their college, career, and life aspirations through equitable access to programs, resources, and high-quality instruction.

We nurture the whole child and listen to student voices so that students and graduates have a sense of pride and belonging.

Students and graduates demonstrate kindness, cultural competence, and respect for diversity and each other.



## PASSIONATE PEOPLE

We engage and retain passionate, dedicated people who continuously learn and improve as guardians of equity and advocates for our students' success.

Our team represents the diversity of our community.

We deliver and receive excellent customer service.



## PARTNERSHPS WITH FAMILIES & COMMUNITY

We highly value our families and the community; we welcome and invite collaboration and partnership.

Communication is inclusive, accessible, goes two-ways, and is always based on high expectations within a supportive environment.



## EFFICIENT SYSTEMS & EQUITABLE RESOURCES

We engage stakeholders to develop and improve inclusive systems and procedures.

People know who to go to, for what, and receive a timely and fair response.

We allocate resources to promote equitable access and outcomes for all.

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# School Culture, Climate & Safety

## Proactive Interventions Since 2022

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- **Proactive Safety Supports & Interventions**
  - Safety Team- (added 80) \$3.2 M
  - Parent Liaisons- (added 16) \$420k
  - Restorative Practice Specialists- (added 8) \$425k
  - Social Workers/School Counselors- (added 9) about \$585k
  - Psychologists (added 4) about \$252k
  - Community Engagement Officers (5 of 6 contractual) \$250k
- **Other mental health interventions provided through the Office of Student Support Services**
  - Gaggle (flags potential issues like cyberbullying, violence, & potential self-harm)
  - SpeakUp for Safety Tip Line (available on our website)
  - Substance Abuse Counselor
  - Nurses
  - Free Counseling Services for Students & Families

**Relationships = Safety**

**About \$5.132 M  
budgeted annually in  
new/additional personnel  
supports for all buildings**



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# Supporting School Culture, Climate & Safety through Intervention

## Student Support Services

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- Restorative Practice Specialists- 16 FTE's (added 3 in the 24-25 SY)
- Social Workers 64 FTE's (added 4 in the 24-25 SY)
- School Counselors 44 FTE's (added 6 in 22-23 SY)
- Psychologists 34 (added 4 in 24-25 SY)
- Student Engagement & Attendance Specialists 9 FTE's (added 5 in 23-24 SY)
- Gaggle (identifies potential issues like cyberbullying, violence, & potential self-harm)
- SpeakUp for Safety Tip Line (available on our website)
- Substance Abuse Counselor 2 FTE's (added 1 in 24-25)
- Nurses 24 FTE's
- Psychiatric Nurse Practitioner 1 FTE
- Free Counseling Services for Students & Families (Crisis Prevention Team, Gaggle Therapy and Cartwheel pilot in 24-25 SY)
- PBIS (Positive Behavior in Schools)
- Diversion Team
- Second Step-Social Emotional Learning Curriculum



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# IEE Department: Safety/Relationship Supports

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- **Proactive Safety Supports & Interventions**
  - **Community School Coordinators (6 schools)**
    - **Cartwheel (5 elementary community schools)**
  - **Parent Liaisons- One in each building**
  - **IEE Specialists-District Wide**
  - **Family Outreach Center (FOC)-Located off Henry Street**
- **Coming soon: Therapeutic Crisis Intervention for Families (TCIF)**



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# School Culture, Climate & Safety

## Proactive Interventions Since 2022

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- **Physical upgrades to existing systems for proactive safety measures:**
  - Raptor Visitor Management System
  - Raptor Volunteer Management System
  - Enhancement of cameras and access control
  - Creation of student ID's for secondary level
  - Creation of an Incident Command Center
  - Digital two-way communication system district-wide
  - Door alarms on all district buildings
  - Single point of entry for district-wide visitors
  - Secure vestibules constructed with all buildings touched by the 2030 project plan
  - Enhancement of PA systems underway district-wide
  - Re-coring of exterior door district-wide (elimination of legacy keys)
  - Automated lockdown systems/buttons added to every building



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# Our District Wide Safety Committee

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## Who is our District Wide Safety Committee?

- Made up of all SCSD stakeholder groups- (including faculty, staff, administrators, parent liaisons, PD, FD and community members)
- Meets bi-monthly year-round and helps to guide each building's Safety Team
- Designed to keep safety and positive school climate at the forefront of our work
- Had a subcommittee to discuss Enhanced Weapons Detection systems, Passive Use of Artificial intelligence in Weapons Detection and Security Screening systems



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# Our District Wide Safety Committee

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Committee members representing all stakeholders have expressed concern around the school culture and climate as it pertains to safety, specifically.

- During the 2023-2024 school year, there were incidents involving weapons at multiple buildings
  - Loaded gun in OMS locker
  - Loaded gun in a student backpack at MPMS
  - Pellet guns found on 4 occasions
  - Knives found on 46 occasions (on average 1/week)
  - 65 incidents involving weapons at secondary buildings (74 District-wide)
- City-wide/area-wide increase in violent incidents involving weapons



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## District Wide Safety Committee Survey

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- What does our District Wide Safety Committee think?
  - Subcommittee formed
  - Survey conducted

For full survey results and comments, click the link:

**[Schenectady Safety Survey \(Over 500 Responses\)](#)**

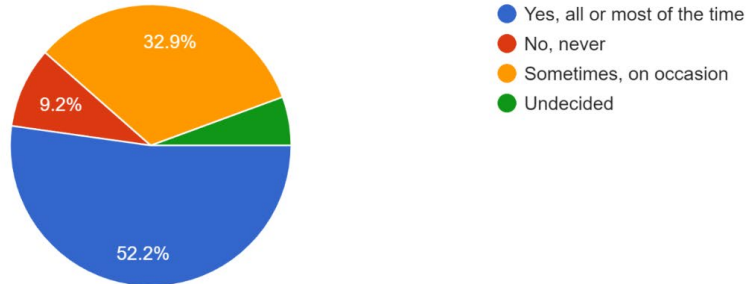


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# District Safety Committee Survey says:

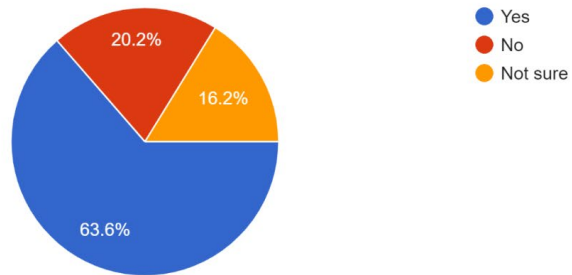
Do you feel metal detector systems improve safety?

519 responses



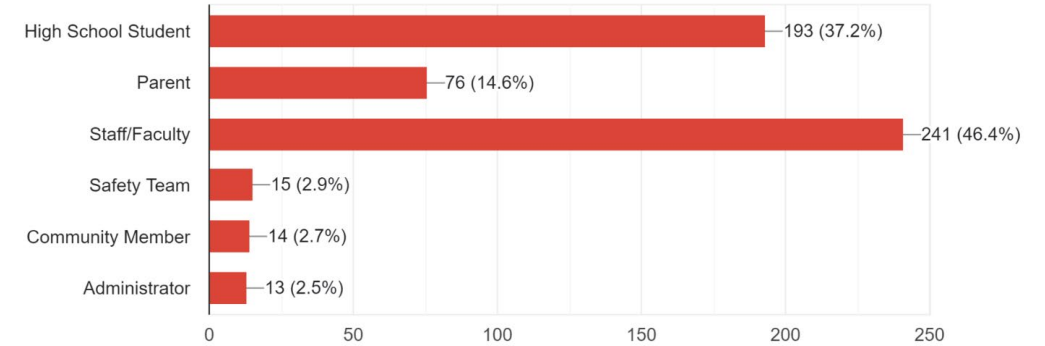
Would you support the the use of metal detector systems in all of our secondary 9-12 schools?

519 responses



What is your role? Please check all that apply.

519 responses



Where would you support the use of metal detector systems in our 9-12 Secondary School Buildings?

519 responses



**Survey was open from 1/4/24 to 1/17/24**  
**Question regarding race/ethnicity added on 1/8/24**  
**following initial feedback**



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## District Wide Safety Committee Survey says:

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When asked where else weapons detections systems are seen (check all that apply)

- 165 Malls (32%)
- 157 Hospitals (30%)
- 474 Airports (91%)
- 273 Amusement Parks (53%)
- 192 When visiting other schools (37%)
  
- Less than 20 said Courts/Jails/Gov't buildings (5%)



# District Wide Safety Committee Discussion & Findings:

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- It is widely accepted that the number 1 item that leads to true “school safety” is every student having a meaningful relationship with a trusted adult staff member
- Emphasized the importance of building relationships to enhance trust and collaboration among staff, students, parents and the community
- We want to ensure safety while not giving off the appearance of an overreaction
- Due diligence and input from all stakeholders helps the Board of Education make the final determination
- All systems are only as good as their operators
- There is no price we can put on preventing an act of violence, but multiple avenues must work together to achieve real safety
- There is no simple solution or single solution
- We have a duty to take some action based on the events that have taken place- what is that action?

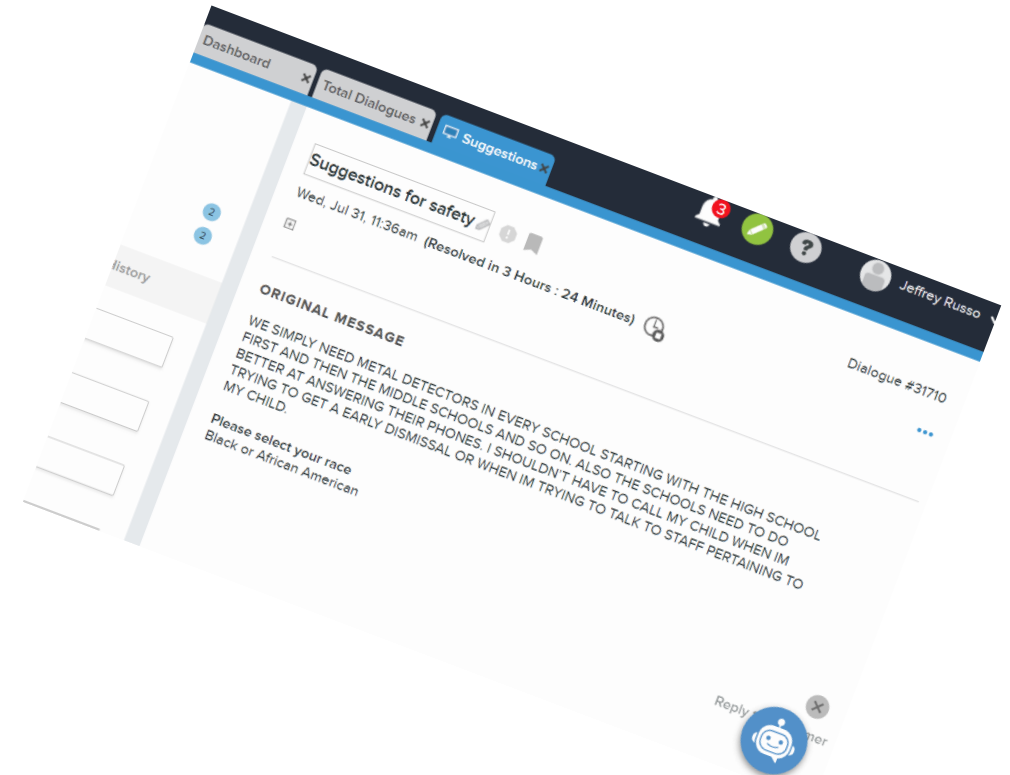
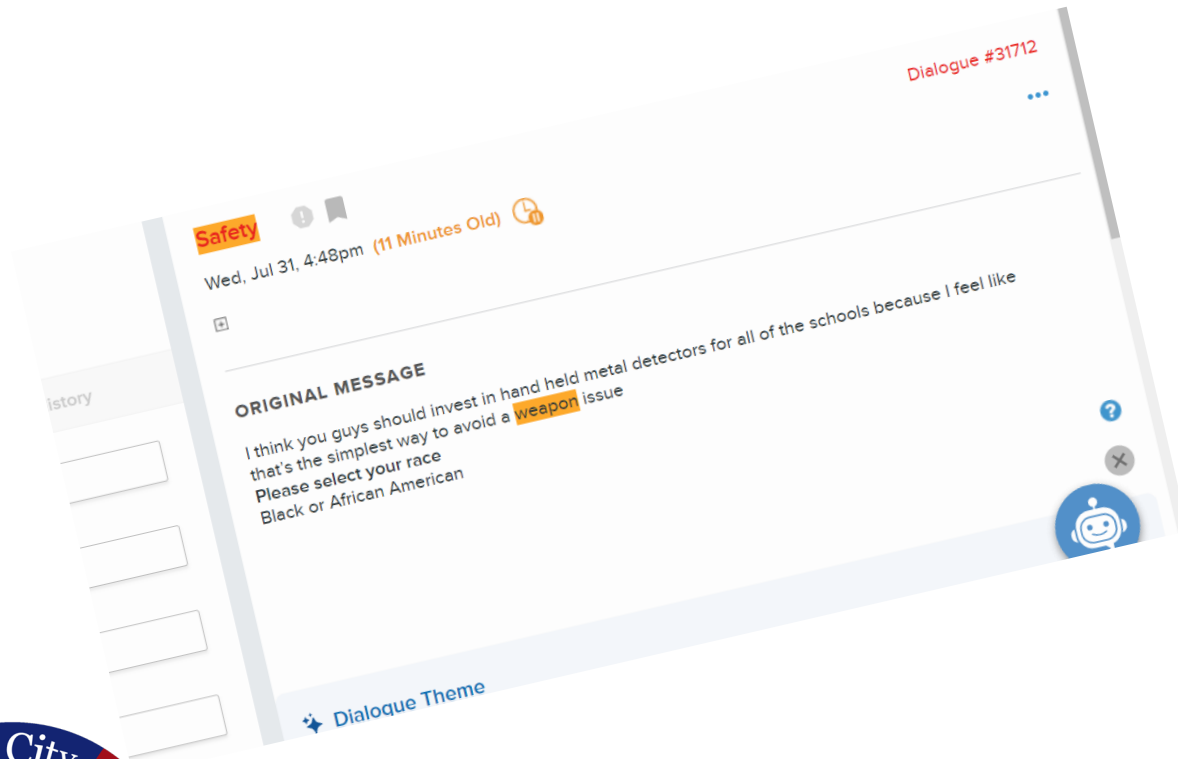


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# Stakeholder feedback- Thought Exchange: Survey 2

## Thought Exchange summary

Rupinder Pilkington



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# Stakeholder feedback- Thought Exchange: Themes from Community

| Themes                                     | Insights  | Areas of Concern  |
|--|---|---|
| School Safety Measures                     | 63% of participants believe the school district does not have adequate safety measures.   | The perception that current safety measures are inadequate from a large majority of participants indicate a significant area of concern, given how vital it is for students and staff to feel safe in their schools.  |
| Security Screening System                  | 72% believe a security screening system is effective, and 88% would support its installation.   | While there is strong support, the implications and logistics of implementing such a system need to be considered carefully. The overwhelming response in support of the implementation of security screening systems shows that this should be prioritized with great care in the near future. |
| Community Involvement and Information      | 66% feel the community is not adequately informed about school happenings and safety procedures.  | The expressed lack of information from a significant portion of the participants suggests an urgent need for improved communication strategies.   |
| Additional Safety Measures                 | Participants suggested various additional safety measures, including a security screening system (21%), additional safety officers (18%), and increased mental health services (16%). | There is a lot of interest and desire for additional safety measures indicating areas where the school district could potentially enhance its safety protocols to foster a better sense of safety for its community.  |
| Feeling Welcomed at School District Events | Less than half (47%) feel welcomed at school district events and/or meetings.   | A significant number of participants do not feel welcomed at school district events, suggesting a big problem surrounding inclusivity. This indicates a huge need for better community engagement and diversity and/or inclusivity efforts.   |



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# Stakeholder feedback- Thought Exchange: Themes from Families

| Theme                               | Insights  | Areas of Concern   |
|-------------------------------------|---|--|
| <b>1. School Safety Perception</b>  | Majority of the participants feel that their child is safe at school (69%) and on their way to/from school (73%). However, only 47% of parents feel that their child is safe at school, with 30% disagreeing and 23% unsure.                  | There is a significant number of parents who do not feel that their child is safe at school. This indicates a grave need for improved communication and possibly additional safety measures.   |
| <b>2. Respect in School</b>         | Most participants (67%) believe that their child is treated with respect at school by teachers, administrators, and staff. Also, 59% agree that the school atmosphere encourages respect.   | However, there are still a significant number of participants who are unsure (21%) or disagree (12%) that their child is treated with respect. This suggests a strong need for improved communication and possibly training for staff.   |
| <b>3. School Communication</b>      | Majority of the participants (69%) feel that they are kept adequately informed about school happenings, programs, policies, practices, and procedures around safety preventative and intervention systems.                                    | 22% of participants do not feel adequately informed, indicating a need for improved communication strategies.  |
| <b>4. School Safety Measures</b>    | Only 27% of participants believe that the school district has adequate safety measures in place, while 42% disagree and 31% are unsure.   | This data demonstrates a significant concern about the current safety measures. Due to the nature and importance of this topic, the need for improvement should be prioritized and given great weight.   |
| <b>5. Security Screening System</b> | A large majority of participants (81%) would support the installation of a security screening system if there was a consensus among stakeholders. Also, 77% believe that a security screening system is effective in enhancing school safety. | There are still participants who are unsure (13%) or disagree (6%) with the installation of a security screening system. This may suggest a need for further discussion and education about the benefits of such a system, in addition to validating and addressing the community's concerns about it. |





# Stakeholder feedback- Thought Exchange: Themes from Faculty and Staff

| Themes                            | Insights   | Areas of Concern   |
|-----------------------------------|--|--|
| <b>School Safety Perception</b>   | A significant number of participants (48%) feel safe at school, but when asked if they think their school is safe, the majority (36%) are unsure.  | There is a big discrepancy between personal feelings of safety and the perceived safety of the school environment. This could indicate a noteworthy lack of trust in the school's safety measures.                               |
| <b>Respectful School Culture</b>  | Less than half of the participants (33%) believe that their school fosters a culture of respect among students, teachers, staff, and administration.   | The lack of a respectful culture could contribute to feelings of insecurity and discomfort among the school community.   |
| <b>School Safety Measures</b>     | More than half of the participants (55%) do not think their school has enough safety measures in place.  | There is a clear demand for more safety measures in schools. This could include physical security measures, mental health services, or conflict resolution practices.  |
| <b>Additional Safety Measures</b> | The most desired additional safety measures are an increase in mental health services (18%) and security screening systems (18%).  | While there is a demand for more physical security measures, there is also a significant demand for mental health services amongst participants of this group. This indicates a strong desire for a holistic approach to safety. |
| <b>Security Screening Systems</b> | Despite no participants expressing a belief in the effectiveness of security screening systems, 90% would support their installation if there was agreement among other students, families, and the community. | There is a willingness to try new safety measures, even if their effectiveness is uncertain. However, this decision should be made with the consensus of the school community.   |



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# Stakeholder feedback- Thought Exchange: Themes from Students

| Themes                            | Insights   | Areas of Concern   |
|-----------------------------------|--|--|
| <b>Safety Perception</b>          | Mixed perception of safety. 47% of participants indicated feeling safe at school, 34% are unsure, 19% do not feel safe. 38% are unsure if their school is safe, 35% believe it is, 27% believe it is not. 71% feel safe while on their way to and from school.                                   | The extremely mixed responses regarding feeling safe at school is a big cause of concern, as every student needs to feel that their school is a safe space in order to thrive and learn.                           |
| <b>Communication</b>              | 69% of participants reported being regularly informed about school events, programs, and safety measures by teachers, administrators, or staff.  | While the majority of respondents expressed satisfaction about communication, there are a number of students who expressed concern about not being regularly informed of school events, programs, safety measures. |
| <b>Welcoming Environment</b>      | 60% of participants feel welcomed at school, while 25% are unsure and 15% do not feel welcomed.  | A notable number of students either feel unsure or unwelcome at school, signifying a need to better foster an inclusive environment where every student feels respected and welcome for their unique identities.   |
| <b>Safety Measures</b>            | Mixed opinions on whether their school has enough safety measures in place. 43% believe it does, 33% believe it does not, and 25% are unsure. Most popular additional safety measures: "All of the above" (22%), "Additional safety officers" (18%), "Increase in mental health services" (16%). | There were mixed opinions on whether enough safety measures are in place, and a large number of enthusiastic suggestions for additional measures.  |
| <b>Security Screening Systems</b> | While no participants provided their opinion on the effectiveness of security screening systems, 74% would support their installation if there was agreement among other students, families, and the community.  | There were little to no opinions on the effectiveness of current security screening systems, but 74% would support installation if there was agreement, indicating a very strong enthusiasm for installation.      |



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# Stakeholder feedback- Thought Exchange: Shared Sentiment

## SHARED SENTIMENT

**Question:** Would you support the installation of security screening systems if there was agreement to do so among other students, or your families and the community?

| Student Perspective on Safety       |                    | Faculty Perspective on Safety       |                    | Family Safety Survey                |                    | Community Safety Survey             |                   |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------|
|                                     | Yes                |                                     | Yes                |                                     | Yes                |                                     | Yes               |
| Prefer Not to Answer                | 61.9% (39)         | Prefer Not to Answer                | 94.6% (87)         | Prefer Not to Answer                | 79.4% (27)         | Prefer Not to Answer                | 100.0% (5)        |
| Black/African American              | 67.5% (102)        | Black/African American              | 86.2% (25)         | Black/African American              | 75.8% (25)         | Black/African American              | <5*               |
| Alaskan Native                      | <5*                | Alaskan Native                      | <5*                | Alaskan Native                      | <5*                | Alaskan Native                      | <5*               |
| Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific... | 50.0% (5)          | Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific... | <5*                | Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific... | <5*                | Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific... | <5*               |
| Asian                               | 79.6% (43)         | Asian                               | 90.9% (10)         | Asian                               | 83.3% (10)         | Asian                               | <5*               |
| Multiracial                         | 71.0% (22)         | Multiracial                         | 100.0% (9)         | Multiracial                         | 69.2% (9)          | Multiracial                         | <5*               |
| White                               | 69.7% (69)         | White                               | 89.0% (194)        | Native American                     | <5*                | White                               | 86.7% (13)        |
| Native American                     | 83.3% (10)         | Native American                     | <5*                | White                               | 83.8% (67)         | Native American                     | <5*               |
| Hispanic or Latino/a/x              | 67.0% (67)         | Hispanic or Latino/a/x              | 88.2% (15)         | Hispanic or Latino/a/x              | 84.6% (22)         | Hispanic or Latino/a/x              | <5*               |
| Other                               | 78.8% (78)         | Other                               | 100.0% (8)         |                                     |                    |                                     |                   |
| <b>Total</b>                        | <b>70.2% (436)</b> | <b>Total</b>                        | <b>90.8% (355)</b> | <b>Total</b>                        | <b>80.8% (164)</b> | <b>Total</b>                        | <b>88.0% (22)</b> |

**Takeaway:** The large majority of participants are in support of installing security screening systems if there was agreement to do so among other students, or your families and the community.



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# Stakeholder feedback- Thought Exchange: Survey 2- Themes

## Family- 321 participants

1. General perception, students not safe at school
2. Respect exists in the schools
3. Communication is adequate
4. Lack safety measures
5. Support screening system (81%)

## Community- 60 participants

1. Lack safety measures
2. Support screening system (88%)
3. Need better communication
4. Increase safety personnel and systems
5. Don't feel welcome at school

## Faculty/staff- 1012 participants

1. Majority do not feel safe at school
2. School culture lacks respect for others
3. Lack safety measures
4. Increase all safety supports
5. Support screening system (90%)

## Students- 954 participants

1. Extremely mixed feelings on feeling safe
2. Communication is adequate
3. Majority feel welcome at school
4. Lack safety measures
5. Support screening system (70%)



# Recommendations based on 2024 Armoured One Building Threat Assessments

(Full assessment reports are confidential and will be provided to the Board)

- **Need for Multiple Layers of Security**
- **Need for Continuous Improvement**
- **Weapons Detection Systems as a next layer**
  - **Key Points of Vulnerability (arrival/dismissal)**
  - **Creating a Secure and Positive Environment**
  - **Reduction in Weapon-Related Incidents (data in link)**

[2024 Armoured One Building Threat Assessments \(from appendix\)](#)



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# Traditional Metal Detector (Garrett)

## Pros:

- Detects all metals
- Sensitivity can be adjusted
- Least expensive technology
- Can be operated by a single person with support
- When used properly and in conjunction with wands, they find everything (knives, guns, vapes).



## Cons:

- Must check everyone
- Slow- need several units
- Require additional tables for removed items
- Not overly welcoming
- Not portable, fixed locations
- As with all systems, only as good as the operators



# Passive use of A.I. in Weapons Detection

## How ZeroEyes Works



## Pros:

- Uses your existing equipment
- Human element to maintain fidelity
- Goal is to prevent major event by proactively scanning cameras for weapons
- Just became available through BOCES

## Cons:

- Expensive
- Operates off AI recognition of a displayed weapon only
- Not to be advertised (doesn't answer public question of "what is being done")

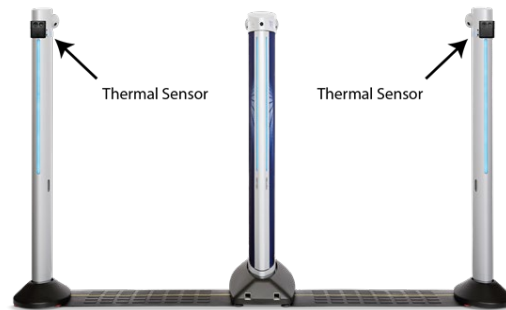


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# Enhanced Weapons Detection Systems (OpenGate, Evolv, Ronin, Extract One)

## Pros:

- Speed- no need to pass through individually
- Can be wrapped to have less intimidating appearance
- Popular in amusement parks
- Cost has come down
- Detects gun and pipe bombs (mass casualty weapons).
- User friendly - A.I. technology



## Cons:

- Expensive
- Multiple lanes needed
- Require multiple staff to operate a lane
- False sense of security (unable to detect knives at lower settings).
- As with all systems, only as good as the operators



Jill Lemond- Evolv

Philip Interlichia- Evolv

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**THANK YOU!**

**QUESTIONS?**