



School Visitor Policy

I. PURPOSE AND SCOPE

The District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) mission is to ensure that students reach their full potential through rigorous and joyful learning experiences provided in a nurturing environment. This commitment requires DCPS to regulate school buildings, classrooms, and other aspects of the school community. Schools are public institutions and should be open to visits from parents and other interested parties to the extent that visits do not compromise student or staff safety and do not disrupt the education process or school operations. School buildings will continue to be open to the public as long as visitors do not disrupt school instruction, operation, or activities; or compromise the safety and security of students and staff.

The school principal has the primary responsibility for ensuring visitor access to the school building and ensuring visitor conduct is monitored and supervised while on school property. The principal has the authority to deny access to any individual seeking to enter the school if the principal determines that the visitor's presence poses a danger or disruption to school instruction, operations, or activities, or to students and staff. Visitors who pose a threat or disruption to the school environment may be denied access, expelled from the school building and grounds, or barred subject to the provisions of DCPS *School Barring Notice Procedures*¹ and other related documents on barring notices and temporary barring notices.

This policy provides general procedures that apply to all visits to school buildings and school grounds, as well as specific guidelines for parents and legal/court-appointed guardians, professionals, law enforcement officials, and attorneys. The policy also includes specific information related to the release of student records.

This policy applies to all DCPS school buildings and all exterior school grounds, including playgrounds and any other buildings and areas on DCPS property, at all times.

This policy rescinds and supersedes all previous policies, memoranda, and guidance promulgated by DCPS on this subject matter. Nothing in this policy will supersede federal, state, or local law.

II. AUTHORITY AND APPLICABLE LAW

Source	Citation
District of Columbia Law	- D.C. Official Code § 22-3302(b) – Unlawful Entry on Property - D.C. Official Code § 38-2571.03 – Procedural Safeguards; Due Process Requirements

¹ Available at dcps.dc.gov/publication/school-barring-notice-procedures.

III. KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Classroom Observation means an observation by an individual, an advocate, or group interested in observing a specific class or program that is arranged with a member of the school staff.

School Building means any part of a DCPS-operated school building and all exterior school grounds, including the playground, parking lot, and any other buildings or areas on DCPS property.

Visitor means any person who seeks to enter a school building or school grounds who is not a student currently enrolled at the specific school or a teacher or staff member who is currently assigned to that specific school. Members of a school's parent teacher organization or local school advisory team as well as DCPS Central Services staff and other members of the DC government are considered visitors.

IV. REQUIREMENTS

A. Security Procedures for All School Visitors

All visitors must comply with the following procedures regarding visits to a school building:

1. The main entrance of a school building will be used for all exits and entries to the school, except in the event of fire or emergency evacuation. Any person found violating this rule will be immediately reported to the principal, principal's designee, or school contract security officer.
2. The following sign will be posted at the main entrance to all school buildings:

ALL VISITORS
Upon entering this building, you must be cleared for entry by security and report to the main office. Only stakeholders who have approved school-related business will be granted access to enter the building. Any unauthorized entry is in violation of D.C. Code § 22-3302(b) and will be subject to criminal prosecution.

3. All visitors must immediately report to the security desk or station to identify themselves, pass through any applicable weapons abatement process or security screening process, and receive a visitor's badge. Proper identification must be presented to receive a badge. Proper identification includes a driver's license or other government-issued personal identification card, passport, or a current employee identification card from a local or federal government agency or private entity.
4. All visitors must sign the school security visitor's log. The log will have appropriate columns so that visitors can provide their name, purpose of visit or person they are visiting, times of entry and departure, and agency/office and badge number (if applicable).
5. After completing the screening process, visitors will be issued a visitor's badge indicating their destination in the building. Visitors must always wear or display their visitor's badge while on school premises. Visitors will then proceed to the main office. After checking in with the main office and at the direction of school staff, visitors should proceed to their designated location.

6. Visitors must follow the instructions provided to them at the security station and main office. As directed by the principal, school security may limit the areas and time during which the visitor may access the building, but not in a manner that will unreasonably infringe upon the rights of a parent or a parent's designee to observe or support a child in the classroom. The scope and duration of the visit will correspond with the purpose of the visit.
7. All visitors must sign out on the visitor log prior to exiting the building and return their visitor badge to security.

All staff members must relay concerns regarding the presence or conduct of visitors to school security or the principal immediately so that further appropriate action may be taken.

Visitors who do not pass the security screening process will only be allowed to enter the building at the discretion of the principal or their designee. Visitors who are denied entry will be provided with information on how to initiate an inquiry into the results of the security screening process.

The security procedures described above may be modified for visitors to an event on school grounds (e.g., sporting events). In these cases, visitors must follow all security procedures established by school security and school staff, including any applicable weapons abatement process or security clearance process.

Under specific circumstances, security procedures for visitors to the school building may be modified with the approval of the DCPS Central Services Office of Operations. Principals or other event organizers must contact the Office of Operations before any security procedures may be modified.

B. Parents, Legal/Court-Appointed Guardians, and Other Visitors

Parents and guardians, including educational surrogate parents appointed by the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) or the Family Court of the D.C. Superior Court, should be given wide latitude regarding access to the school for the purposes of meeting with their child's teacher or other school staff, or observing their child's class. However, a parent or guardian's presence in the school may not cause a disruption to the function of the school or the instructional program of any student or in any way compromise the safety or security of the school, students, or staff. Prior to an in-class observation, observers must complete and provide to the principal the *Classroom Observer Confidentiality Agreement*.^{2, 3}

Parents and guardians of prospective students should also be given a reasonable opportunity to visit the school and observe proposed classes upon request.

Relatives or caretakers who are not the child's guardian will be permitted to visit the school building if they are accompanied by a parent or guardian or if they have received permission in advance from the child's parent or guardian and the school principal. If a relative or caretaker appears on the emergency contact list for a student, the relative or caretaker will be permitted to access the school building in

² Attorneys, including *guardian ad litem* attorneys; law enforcement; and other visitors as specified by the principal are not required complete the *Classroom Observer Confidentiality Agreement*.

³ Available at dcps.dc.gov/publication/school-visitor-policy.

order to drop off or pick up the student.

If a court order, decree, or agreement describes the rights of parents, guardians, or other relatives with respect to a child, schools must provide access to the child consistent with that order, decree, or agreement. That court order, decree, or agreement should be provided by the parent to the school as soon as reasonably possible. School staff should contact the DCPS Office of the General Counsel (OGC) at OGC@k12.dc.us for guidance on interpreting the terms of a court order, decree, or agreement.

C. Visitors Requesting Access Related to Students with Disabilities

Visitors who request access to a school building to participate in IEP meetings or to observe students with disabilities in classroom settings must comply with the following procedures:

1. IEP and Section 504 Meetings

Visitors may be allowed entry to a school building for the purpose of meeting with school staff regarding a student who is receiving special education services pursuant to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) or accommodations or related services under Section 504. Such visitors may include educational advocates, attorneys, *guardian ad litem* attorneys, evaluators, and parent designees. These visitors must only remain in the school building for the purpose and duration of their scheduled meeting and should not be allowed to walk unaccompanied through the school or observe students in class unless the circumstances described below in [Section IV.C.2, Classroom Observations for Students with Disabilities](#) apply.

Visitors to a school building for special education or Section 504 matters must follow all security procedures in this policy and, upon arrival to the school, must report to the principal or a principal's designee.

2. Classroom Observations for Students with Disabilities⁴

Observations can be conducted by parents as stated in [Section IV.B, Parents, Legal/Court-Appointed Guardians, and Other Visitors](#) above. A parent's designee(s) and professionals completing evaluations of a student will also be allowed to observe the child in the classroom. Professional evaluators conducting an assessment must present an authorization letter from the parent. The authorization letter must indicate what assessment the evaluator is conducting and include the parent's signature giving permission to conduct the observation of the student.

Evaluators will not be permitted to administer assessments in school buildings. Third parties (including attorneys and educational advocates) who are not evaluators, Hearing Officer-designated experts, parents, or parent designee(s) will not be allowed to observe classes while children are in the classroom. A parent of a child with a disability may appoint a designee to observe the child's current or proposed special educational program. This designee must:

- Have professional expertise in the area of special education being observed;
- Be necessary to facilitate an observation for a parent with a disability; or
- Be necessary to provide language translation assistance to a parent.

⁴ D.C. Official Code § 38-2571.03.

A parent-appointed designee may not represent the child or family in litigation related to the provision of a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) nor can the designee have a financial interest in the outcome of such litigation. A designee must agree in writing that they will not disclose nor use any information obtained during the course of an observation for the purpose of seeking or engaging clients in litigation against the District of Columbia or DCPS. In addition:

- All classroom observers must adhere to the requirements of this policy;
- All classroom observations must be scheduled prior to the day of arrival at the school;
- Prior to the in-class observations, any observer must complete and provide to the principal the *Classroom Observer Confidentiality Agreement*;⁵
- In appointing a parent's observer, DCPS may require advance notice and for the designation to be in writing by completing the *Observation Designee Form*;^{6, 7}
- The parent, designee, or evaluator must act in such a manner that allows the regular school program to continue during the observation by refraining from engaging the attention of the teacher or other student(s) through conversation or other means;
- The parent, designee, or evaluator may be accompanied by DCPS personnel at the discretion of DCPS;
- Attorneys who are representing the parent's child in litigation related to the provision of a FAPE should only be in the school building to attend a student's IEP meeting, retrieve student records, or speak with a member of the school staff. Attorneys have no legal right to observe any class and will not be permitted to do so;
- In all instances of professionals visiting the school for special education matters, an appointment should be made with the relevant school staff person or an IEP meeting should be previously arranged and notice issued to all relevant attendees;
- School staff are under no obligation or requirement to meet with an attorney, educational advocate, or observer or to allow them access to the school if prior arrangements have not been made and agreed upon; and
- Other professionals, not explicitly described above, visiting the school for special education matters must have no direct interaction with students, including the student who is the subject of the observation.

DCPS does not permit private/independent service providers⁸ to provide services on DCPS property, including those funded by health insurance. DCPS must ensure the safety, security, and confidentiality of all students and comply with the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA).

D. Attorneys and Legal Professionals

Under certain circumstances, attorneys and other legal professionals may have reason to visit schools. These visits must comply with the following procedures:

⁵ Available at dcps.dc.gov/publication/school-visitor-policy.

⁶ The time allowed for the observation will be sufficient to allow the parent, evaluator, or other designee to evaluate the child's performance in a current program or a proposed program to support the child and in the setting where the program or proposed program would normally occur.

⁷ Available at dcps.dc.gov/publication/school-visitor-policy.

⁸ Organizations that provide wraparound or community-based supports and services to students may be permitted to provide services on DCPS property to the extent that they do not disrupt the school environment.

1. All Attorneys and Legal Professionals

All attorneys and legal professionals, including those from the United States Attorney's Office, the Office of the Attorney General of the District of Columbia, the Public Defender Service, or any private attorney, must show their identification and any security badge, if applicable, at the security desk or station. They must then be directed to the main office to speak with a principal or designee.

If any attorney or legal professional wishes to receive education records or any information contained in education records, the principal or designee must contact DCPS' OGC to receive clearance to release such records or other student data, unless the attorney or legal professional has a valid authorization to release records signed by a parent or guardian.⁹

2. *Guardian Ad Litem* Attorneys

Guardian ad litem attorneys may observe classes if they present a court order or other reliable documentation indicating they are permitted to do so. The valid court order or other legally binding document must demonstrate the attorney's relationship as *guardian ad litem* for the child. The court order must be signed by a judge, must indicate the student's name, and must be dated within one (1) calendar year of the visit.

3. Attorneys from the Office of the Attorney General of the District of Columbia or the United States Attorney's Office

If an attorney from the Office of the Attorney General of the District of Columbia or United States Attorney's Office has come to the school to question a student regarding a matter, the attorney must first obtain consent from the student's parent if the student is under 18. The principal or designee can contact the student's parent to receive consent for the attorney to talk to the student or to allow the parent time to come to school to participate in the interview but is not required to do so. Ultimately, it is up to the attorney to obtain the required consent.

If an attorney from the Office of the Attorney General of the District of Columbia or United States Attorney's Office has come to the school to investigate a matter and wishes to speak with school staff, the principal and all school staff should cooperate and answer any questions, as long as no undue disruptions are caused to the school environment or to class instruction.

4. Attorneys Serving a Subpoena

If an attorney or other person (e.g., an attorney's investigator or process server) intends to serve a subpoena on DCPS or a DCPS employee in their capacity as a government employee, the school staff must inform the attorney that DCPS' OGC accepts service on behalf of DCPS and its employees and direct the attorney to take the subpoena to DCPS' OGC. If the attorney refuses, school staff should contact DCPS' OGC for assistance. If necessary, OGC can authorize school staff to accept the subpoena and then immediately send it to OGC for review.

⁹ Available at dcps.dc.gov/service/student-records-request.

5. Attorneys from the Public Defender Service and Private Attorneys

Attorneys from the Public Defender Service and private attorneys (including their investigators, process servers, and other staff) must follow all applicable security requirements of this policy.

School staff should contact DCPS' OGC for guidance before engaging with the Public Defender Service or private attorneys in any matter.

School employees are not required to speak with attorneys from the Public Defender Service unless a valid subpoena has been issued naming the employee as a witness in a court proceeding. These proceedings will always involve the government in some capacity. If a subpoena has been issued and the issuing attorney or investigator wishes to speak with the employee, the principal or designee should allow the employee to speak with the issuing attorney/investigator as long as it poses only minimal disruptions to the school environment or to class instruction.

School employees are not required to speak with attorneys representing parents in private custody proceedings that do not involve the government unless a valid subpoena has been issued naming the employee as a witness in a private custody proceeding. DCPS' OGC can accept service of private custody subpoenas on an employee's behalf with the employee's permission. However, if an employee is served with a subpoena in a private custody matter, the principal or the employee should contact DCPS' OGC for guidance. The principal should allow the employee to speak with the issuing attorney or investigator as long as it poses only minimal disruptions to the school environment or to class instruction. Employees may also be entitled to receive witness appearance fees in private custody matters so long as no official government resources, including the employee's duty time, are utilized.

Under no circumstances should such attorneys have any direct interaction with students, unless the attorney is representing the student in court case. In that instance, the attorney may be allowed to interact with the student in a manner that minimizes disruption to the student's classroom instruction. If the student is under 18, school staff must contact a parent/guardian to obtain consent prior to allowing access.

E. Law Enforcement, Investigators, and Other Government Officials

School staff should make every effort to cooperate with law enforcement, including local, state, and federal police officers and investigators as well as investigators from the DC Office of the Inspector General and D.C. Child and Family Services Agency (CFSA). However, school visits should be conducted in a manner that does not disrupt the school environment or class instruction unless absolutely necessary.

The principal or designee should serve as the main point of contact and facilitator for all law enforcement visits. To the extent possible, schools can request that law enforcement visits take place with reasonable advance notice (i.e., 24 hours) to minimize disruption to the school environment. School staff should request that law enforcement voluntarily provide their credentials in connection with any request to enter the school building. School staff may inquire about whether parents or guardians should be present when students are interviewed by law enforcement officials, but the final determination is made by law enforcement.

School staff must cooperate with investigators from the DCPS Central Services Comprehensive Alternative Resolution & Equity (CARE) Team and Office of Labor Management & Employee Relations (LMER).

F. Release of Student Records

To comply with FERPA, DCPS must not provide access to confidential student records or discuss the content of such records without written authorization granted by the parent/guardian or adult student,¹⁰ or via court order. The principal should call DCPS' OGC with any questions related to FERPA or education records access.

The following requirements apply to requests for student records:

- For private attorneys or third parties, the school must receive a written consent signed within one (1) year of the date of the records request.
- For *guardian ad litem* attorneys and social workers, the school must receive a court order or other document that affirmatively grants access to the records.
- For social workers from child welfare agencies, the social worker must have valid identification to substantiate their status as an employee of a child welfare agency, along with a court order, a valid authorization for release of records, or other document that explicitly grants them access to the records of a particular student(s).

Questions regarding student records should be directed to the Scheduling, Transcripts, and Academic Records Supports (STARS) Team at StudentRecordsRequest@k12.dc.gov.

V. POLICY IMPLEMENTATION REQUIREMENTS

All DCPS employees are required to comply with the requirements set forth in this policy. Questions or concerns regarding the *School Visitor Policy* should be directed to the Office of Operations at OfficeOfOps@k12.dc.gov. Implementation of support resources for this policy will be shared with schools in order to help support its orderly implementation.

DCPS is committed to serving every student with equity, excellence, transparency, and accountability. For any concerns about this policy or to report violations of it, contact the Office of Integrity by completing the Online Referral Form¹¹ or sending an email to dcps.cio@dc.gov.

¹⁰ Available at dcps.dc.gov/service/student-records-request.

¹¹ Available at dcps.dc.gov/integrity.