

DOH/OSPI K-12 Health and Safety Guide Appendix B

Department of Health School Inspection/Assessment Protocols

School and DOH officials have agreed there is a need for standardization in the way schools are approached and inspected by local health jurisdictions. The following inspection protocol was originally drafted by the School Facilities Health and Safety Advisory Committee as an attempt to resolve the issues of 1) being inspected by health departments without established protocols; 2) lack of cooperation between schools and health agencies; and 3) improving the communication of inspection findings.

Recommended Inspection/Assessment Procedure

1. First meeting with school district.

At the direction of the school superintendent, it is essential to communicate with, or meet with, the school district or private school designee(s) and establish an initial point of contact (person) for future meetings, communications, and correspondence. At this meeting the health agency representative should share the forms, rules and guidelines as well as any administrative procedures that will impact the schools. Sample letters and reports may be shared to let the schools know what to expect. Schools may share facility plans, current and long-range plans, budget constraints, local priorities, and examples of inspection reports performed by other agencies/entities, including self-inspection reports.

2. Schedule inspections.

To accommodate the various needs and situations that exist in different school districts and private schools, it is important that health agencies work cooperatively through the school district or private school contact person to establish an appropriate inspection schedule. The schedule should establish dates, times and approximate duration that may be needed for each visit. It is important this be done for several reasons including developing trust, increasing the level of communication between health agency and school personnel, sharing technical expertise, and appropriate interaction when dealing with issues that arise.

3. Establish site contacts.

Once contact with the school district or private school is established, it is important to similarly establish contacts at each school facility. Each school will have different circumstances that will govern access to various areas of the buildings at different times of the day. In addition, having a school site person along during the site visit may not be convenient on a given day, due to schedule conflicts, illnesses or other circumstances. The school contact may be a principal, safety representative, custodian or other staff representative as directed by the school administrator.

4. Perform the inspection.

Using a form or checklist and supporting documentation agreed to in advance, the health agency representative should perform a routine, comprehensive, targeted, or follow-up inspection or assessment as needed. The school district and school contacts should be notified in advance regarding the type of inspection they are receiving to know what to expect in the report.

5. Have a closing conference.

The closing conference allows the health official and school representative to review the results of the visit together and agree upon what actions might be necessary. The health official may also be able to assist the school with resolving issues, providing resources and prioritization of health and safety items.

Reports should distinguish between requirements and recommendations based on best practices recommendations. Items that do not conform should not be listed as “violations” or “citations.” Rather, they should be listed as findings or deficiencies. Reports should identify the item in question and that it does not conform to the requirement or recommendation. Requirements should be provided with a WAC or other code reference; recommendations should be provided with a standard or recommended practice.

6. Draft report.

Once the school facility has been inspected, a report labeled “DRAFT” should be written. This will identify it as being different from the subsequent “FINAL” report. In accordance with the procedure that has been agreed upon in advance with the school district or private school, provide a copy of the draft report to the school district or private school contact person(s). The contact person(s) will prepare responses to each of the items that have been noted. Be aware that schools are sensitive to terminology, and the word “violation” is sometimes misused to apply to non-conformance with a “recommendation” which may not be expressly incorporated into the board of health rules. Draft copies of reports should only be sent to the school districts or private schools and not be forwarded to others.

7. Review the school district’s/private school’s comments.

The health official and the school district or private school should agree to a time frame for review of the draft reports. Working with the school district is critical to maintain communication in a positive and open fashion.

The health official and the school district or private school may wish to meet in person or by video conference call to review the draft reports and discuss areas of agreement as well as disagreement or misunderstanding. This meeting should also allow both parties to explain their intentions and priorities. It is of considerable value to the health official to allow the school district or private school to propose reasonable timelines to correct problems that are found during the inspection. This allows schools to work within the

available public funding budgets at their disposal and identify any budget line items that may be required in the future.

8. Issue the final report.

The final report should be addressed to the school district and private school board of directors and district superintendent or principal in accordance with the board of health rules {WAC 246-366-040(2)(b)}. Private school reports should be sent to the top administrator, usually the principal. In addition, it is highly recommended the report be copied to the school district or private school contact person, since this will be the person who will be responsible for working with the health official and addressing the items noted in the report. These details should be worked out at the first meeting between the school district or private school and the health official so there are no “surprises” to the school district or private school.

9. Follow-up reports.

A follow-up visit should be done to identify which items have been corrected and which have not. A follow-up report should recognize the school’s progress on each issue they have corrected or addressed as well as noting areas which still do not conform to established regulations or recommendations. Timelines may need to be revised by the school with input from the health agency on priority items, for matters that have not been corrected. In this way, the health official’s reports may be of assistance to school staff in presenting funding needs to school decision-makers and others.

Recommended Report Format

1. **General Introduction.** Should describe the focus (general or targeted areas) and purpose of the inspection and cite the authority under which the inspection is being conducted.
2. **Report findings.** Describe the problem found by item number in the K-12 Health and Safety Guide/WAC 236-366, where it is located on the premises, and reference the problem to a regulation or recommendation that pertains to it. The findings may be discussed in narrative fashion if desired.
3. **Make recommendations.** Recommendations may be centered around facility repairs and improvements or focus on process and operational suggestions.
4. **Prioritize issues.** Some items identified during the inspection may have been corrected by the time the report is issued while other items may be expensive and require long-range planning and funding efforts to resolve. Other items may pose serious risks for accidents or health problems. Some items pose a lower risk of health and safety problems than others but are still important to the health official for prioritizing.
5. **Identify any follow-up inspection date.** Dates for any follow-up inspection(s) should be set for documenting progress on the items identified on the inspection report.