Safe Schools Toolkit

Strategies for governance teams to support students and staff
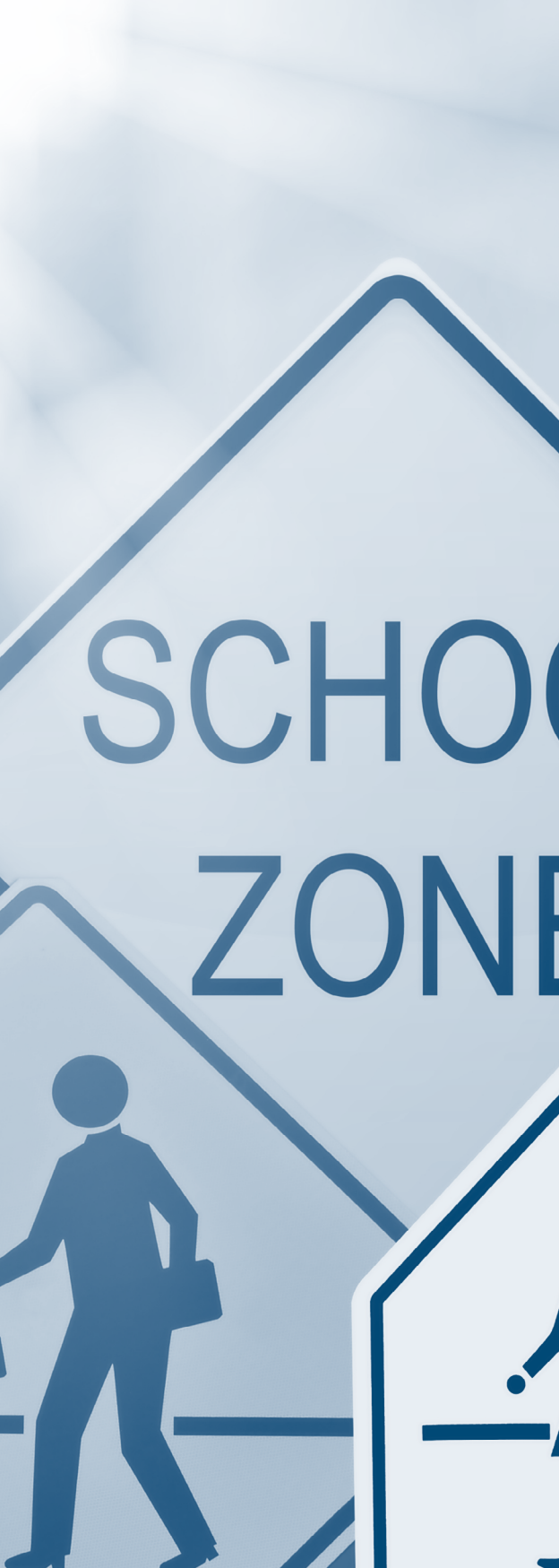
Fourth Edition, 2024

csba

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A NOTE FROM CSBA CEO & EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR VERNON M. BILLY

School safety is complex work requiring the implementation of various strategies to address conventional bullying and cyberbullying, conduct behavioral threat assessments, develop infrastructure, facilitate community engagement, support the social-emotional well-being of students and staff, and much more. The safety of our schools is a shared goal that requires collaborative efforts from all partners — boards of education, administrators, teachers, parents, law enforcement, and the wider community.

The most effective approaches to creating safe and supportive school environments demonstrate a comprehensive, coordinated effort guided by values and policy established at the board level. Governance teams can impact the school environment and climate by setting direction, establishing effective organizational structures, providing support for implementation, holding the system accountable, and engaging in community leadership and advocacy.

CSBA has developed a suite of resources for governance teams to support your work and help you make timely and informed decisions on school safety policies, practices, and procedures. This work requires iterative processes to create, review, and assess policies and systems regularly. So, I encourage you to both read through the toolkit and share and discuss it with your colleagues.

To make this complex topic easier to navigate, CSBA felt it was important to break down the many components of school safety. To that end, our previous safe school guidebook has been revised and reformatted into a toolkit that provides data, resources, and strategies to help governance teams create positive school environments where students feel safe, supported, connected to others, and prepared to learn.

CSBA's Safe Schools Toolkit provides an introduction to school safety as it relates to school climate and the effects that disruptions or violence have on students, school staff, and the community. It details the board's role in fostering safe campuses and includes CSBA's Policy Pillars aligned with safety and learning. The toolkit presents a variety of effective prevention and intervention strategies for creating positive, safe school climates and preparing for disruptive incidents should they occur. The many topics covered in detail include Comprehensive School Safety Plans (CSSP), behavioral threat assessment, safety infrastructure, sexual exploitation and trafficking, Title IX, and alcohol, tobacco and other drugs (including fentanyl and vaping). New to this revision is a brief on crisis communications. Also included are several policy recommendations related to school safety. In addition to supporting the Association's advocacy, board members may wish to consult these recommendations in their work with other state, federal, and local policymakers.

It is my hope that the Safe Schools Toolkit helps board members gain valuable insights and understanding on the complexities of school safety and informs your work to foster a safe and supportive education system for all students.

Sincerely,

Vernon M. Billy
CEO & Executive Director, CSBA

Safe Schools Toolkit

Strategies for governance teams to support students and staff

Introduction

All students need and deserve safe environments to learn, grow, and thrive. Moreover, all staff need and deserve safe environments to teach, guide, and provide support to each other and their students. Safe school environments lay the foundation for student well-being, both physical and mental, as well as academic success. Therefore, it is imperative that all local educational agencies (LEAs) continuously review and update their safety policies, procedures, and protocols, and work collaboratively with their community and other education partners to strengthen and improve their school environments.

School climate can impact student outcomes

Safety, and perceptions of safety, impact a range of educational outcomes. According to a 2019 United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) report, bullying and poor school climate are correlated with lower student achievement, including test scores.[1] Students who are bullied or who bully perform poorly on standardized tests. Bullying behavior is also correlated with poor school climate, which further negatively impacts academic performance. And the effects of bullying go beyond academics — students who are bullied or bully others are also more likely to use and abuse drugs, report poor health, and engage in sexual activity at an earlier age than their peers.[2]

While school safety encompasses everything from violence to natural disasters, this set of resources focuses on school violence. School violence includes school shootings, physical attacks, verbal assaults, sexual assault, robbery, and threats of violence (with or without weapons).[3] In the 2019–20 school year, 77 percent of schools that participated in the School Survey on Crime and Safety reported one or more incidents of crime.[4] Incidents of crime occurred at a higher rate at middle and secondary/high schools than elementary schools (15 percent), but the incidents were lower for middle schools (58 percent) than secondary/high schools (65 percent).[5]

In addition to crime statistics, students' perceptions of safety shape their experiences at school. According to the most recent data (2019–21) from the California Healthy Kids Survey, an anonymous assessment that surveys students ages 10 and older across the state,

81 percent of elementary students in California feel their school is a safe place.[6] However, only 61 percent of seventh-grade students, 55 percent of ninth-grade students, and 54 percent of 11th-grade students feel their schools are safe.[7]

Governance teams play a key role in fostering safe and supportive school environments

Governance teams can promote safe and supportive school environments by making informed decisions on budgets and policies, reviewing applicable data, and requesting more information from the LEA's administrative teams about Comprehensive School Safety Plans (CSSPs), board policies, and administrative regulations. School safety work is complex and an iterative process of continuous improvement that requires teamwork. Working collaboratively as a governance team with the LEA's administration to analyze, review, and submit CSSPs annually and in a timely manner supports student and staff well-being, as well as school climate.

Investing in mental health supports for students, such as staffing school counselors and psychologists and implementing social and emotional learning curricula and practices, aids in increasing safety and reducing violence.[8] Other practices that increase school safety include investing in and using evidence-based anti-violence programs and interventions; strong collaborations among community, state, and national partners; collecting data and monitoring responses to school violence; training for all staff; and supports for students affected by violence or bullying.[9] Further, LEAs can assess whether the

implementation of safety measures have resulted in disproportionate and inequitable disciple outcomes for specific student groups — in particular, Black students and students with disabilities — by conducting equity reviews.[10] LEAs can review disciplinary data to investigate whether these student groups (Black students and students with disabilities) are disproportionately referred to law enforcement and/or pushed out of schools.[11]

More information about the CSSP and its required components can be found in the section titled Comprehensive School Safety Plans (CSSPs).

Overview of the revised Safe Schools Toolkit

The basis of the Safe Schools Toolkit was a guidebook originally developed by CSBA's School Safety Task Force in 1994. In 1999, the guide was updated, and, in 2011, it was revised again and expanded with the assistance of CSBA's School Health Advisory Committee. This fourth edition (2024) has been updated and revised with the support of education and school safety experts from across California. It has also been reformatted into a toolkit for electronic publication for easier access and better usability.

This latest revision includes new and updated school safety terminology, information about the most current threats to safety, and up-to-date resources for LEAs to use when implementing school safety policies and procedures. The Safe Schools Toolkit also includes updated information and data on school safety threats and provides strategies to help governing boards make informed decisions when approving budgets, policies, and administrative regulations on school safety.

This resource addresses ways governing boards can:

▸ Create and foster a positive school climate where students feel safe, supported, connected to others, and prepared to learn by aligning budgets to safety plans.

▸ Support students and staff by reviewing and updating policies that make schools safer.

▸ Communicate safety information and procedures and collaborate with education and community partners in times of crisis.

Each segment of the Safe Schools Toolkit is a standalone section and contains:

▸ Information, research, and data on a school safety topic.

▸ Applicable questions governance teams should consider about that safety topic.

▸ Relevant resources about the safety topic to consult for more information.

▸ Board policies and administrative regulations for each safety topic.

While the full range of safety considerations is important for school governance teams, this toolkit does not include information and resources on natural disasters like floods, fires, earthquakes, extreme heat, and others. For information on these issues please reference CSBA's climate change resources.[12]

This fourth edition resource is organized in the following manner:

To read more information on a specific topic, click on the linked items below.

1) A note from CSBA's CEO & Executive Director Vernon Billy

2) Introduction
   ▸ The Board's Role in School Safety
   ▸ CSBA Policy Pillars

3) Comprehensive School Safety Plans

4) Supporting a Positive School Climate

5) Bullying and Cyberbullying

6) Impacts of Safety Threats

7) Behavioral Threat Assessment

8) Infrastructure

9) Armed Assailant Response for Schools

10) Sexual Violence, Trafficking, Harassment, and Title IX

11) Alcohol, Tobacco, and Illicit Drugs

12) Crisis Communications

13) Policy Recommendations

Additional CSBA resources on school safety

The most effective approach to creating safe and supportive school environments requires a comprehensive, coordinated effort, including schoolwide, districtwide, and communitywide strategies. Safe and Supportive School Environment (csba.org)

CSBA shares webinars presented by content experts and CSBA staff to provide its members and the education community with in-depth information on school safety topics. School Safety webinars — CSBA's YouTube Channel

With the passage of Senate Bill 906 in 2022, California's LEAs are required, beginning in the 2023–24 school year, to notify families annually about safe gun storage. The Firearm Safety and Storage fact sheet offers a quick reference to the rules and regulations regarding firearm storage in California, statistics about firearms, and strategies to keep students, staff, and communities safe.

Since the 2018 passage of Assembly Bill 2291, all LEAs are required to adopt procedures for preventing acts of bullying and cyberbullying. The "Bullying and Cyberbullying" brief includes definitions, statistics, information on the impacts of bullying and cyberbullying, and signs of being bullied or bullying, as well as how LEAs can help students and families, examples of LEAs' bullying prevention communication, sample questions for board members, and relevant guidance and resources.

The board's role in creating a safe school environment

The governing board is elected to govern the community's schools and thus plays a critical role in ensuring that the schools are safe for students and staff. Working with the superintendent as a governance team, the board provides leadership within the LEA and the surrounding community, playing an essential role in the success of school safety strategies.

While boards of education are not responsible for the day-to-day administration of an LEA, there are several key ways in which governance teams can enhance school safety through their areas of responsibility. These include:

▸ Setting direction for the LEA, including its approach to safe and supportive school practices.

▸ Establishing effective organizational structures and practices through:

» Budget approval;

» Curriculum and instructional materials;

» Local policies and regulations; and

» Annual review and approval of Comprehensive School Safety Plans (CSSPs).

▸ Providing support for implementation with necessary resources, including funding, policies, and professional learning opportunities.

▸ Holding the system accountable through:

» Reviewing and revising safety policies regularly;

» Monitoring progress;

» Analyzing data; and

» Serving as a judicial and appeals body for student suspensions and expulsions.

▸ Engaging in community leadership and advocacy.

The board can enhance school safety through each of its major areas of responsibility:

Setting direction	Establishing effective structures and practices	Providing support	Ensuring accountability	Providing community leadership
This begins with knowledge about the community, understanding its needs, and building the vision and mission based on the identified needs. The board can set the direction for the LEA to inform and inspire family engagement and involvement.	In establishing effective structures and practices, the board needs a deep understanding of the budget, curriculum, and professional learning needs and opportunities.	The board shows its commitment to providing resources and professional learning opportunities for the LEA's staff.	Accountability is an important aspect of the board's role. The board develops an evaluation process that focuses and aligns the work of the LEA and ensures continuous improvement.	This component of the board's responsibility provides an opportunity for the board to model leadership and advocacy for the LEA.

Setting direction	Establishing effective structures and practices	Providing support	Ensuring accountability	Providing community leadership
Establish student and school safety as a priority and communicate the connection to the LEA's vision and mission.	Adopt policies relating to safety curriculum and professional learning to foster safe and supportive school environments.	Operate within board bylaws and policies.	Perform superintendent evaluation.	Engage the community by communicating the value of safe schools to students, families, and others.
Align polices to LEA's vision and mission.	Select a policy committee and implement an ongoing policy review plan.	Receive input on professional learning needs.	Conduct regular board self-evaluation.	Seek opportunities to influence legislative and regulatory bodies.
Determine what, if any, policies should be developed or revised to be consistent with the vision and mission.	Approve plan for the dissemination of policies.	Review and approve funding for resources and materials needed to support safe and supportive school environments.	Review staff progress reports and data on safety programs and policy implementation.	Encourage and support collaboration among community agencies and organizations to support the needs of all children and to help improve the availability and quality of prevention and intervention programs.
Ensure community input is meaningfully considered in setting local safety policies.	Ensure new or updated policies are communicated clearly and staff have support to implement the policies.	Ensure quality educational programs and availability of extracurricular activities that support efforts to reduce harassment, discrimination, and violence and teach students ways of dealing with anger, frustration, or other negative behaviors and feelings.	Conduct formal or informal policy audits.	Establish policies that support family education.
	Annually review the protocol for updating CSSPs.		Review CSBA policy updates (4x/year).	Promote transparency.
	Review staffing plan for positions that foster safe and supportive school environments.		Serve as the judicial and appeals body for suspensions and expulsions.	Review and ensure information online is updated regularly.
			Following significant safety incidents (including credible threats and hoaxes), ensure the administration has reviewed actions taken and areas for improved response for future concerns.	Communicate the relationship between the LEA's safety polices and student success.

Budget allocation considerations for safety resources

School safety is expensive and complex. Thus, using consistent and robust matrices and protocols to review and assess school safety resources helps ensure an LEA's financial resources are used judiciously and with a maximum return on investment. The board may find that local, state, or federal government agencies can contribute funding, staffing, or facilities to support implementation of safety programs. To ensure accountability, the board should ensure evaluations of safety policies and procedures are conducted on a regular basis and ask staff to establish a process and schedule for receiving feedback. Evaluation results should be used to identify needed improvements, justify the LEA's allocation of resources, or discontinue allocations.

Questions governance teams may want to consider for each area:

Setting direction

▸ How do harassment, discrimination, and violence prevention and intervention programs support the LEA's goals for student achievement and school climate?

Establishing effective structures and practices

▸ What formal evaluation process will we use to review and assess whether these safety resources are improving safety? What supports are needed to implement the LEA's safety policies and procedures?

Providing support

▶ Does staff have the right resources and training to support our policies for school safety? If not, what resources and trainings are needed?

Ensuring accountability

▶ What data or evidence exists to justify the purchase of specific safety resources and systems?

▶ What data does the LEA use to assess school climate, student/ staff perceptions of safety, and programs and services to inform safety policies and procedures?

Providing community leadership

▶ Has the LEA consulted and engaged with the community (students, staff, parents and guardians, and community members) on the need for or impact of these safety resources or systems?

▶ Has the LEA consulted with local emergency response teams, law enforcement, mental health experts, and drug prevention and intervention experts for recommendations and guidance on essential safety resources?

Board Bylaws

There are essential documents developed to assist the board in managing the responsibilities within its role. The Board Bylaws in the 9000 series of the Board Policy book are the operating guidelines of the governance team. The following Board Bylaws are relevant to the board's role in creating a safe school environment:

▶ BB 9000 - Role of the Board: Describes the major responsibilities of the board

▶ BB 9010 - Public Statements: Describes public communications by the board

▶ BB 9130 - Board Committees: Describes the board's establishment of committees

▶ BB 9200 - Limits of Board Member Authority: Describes the board as the unit of authority

▶ BB 9310 - Board Policies: Describes the process to create, revise, and adopt district policies

Relevant CSBA board policies and administrative regulations

CSBA GAMUT Policy and Policy *Plus* subscribers have access to sample policies. The following are sample policies and administrative regulations that are relevant to the board's role in school safety.

▶ BP 0000 - Vision

▶ BP 0100 - Philosophy

▶ BP 0200 - Goals for the District

▶ BP 0400 - Comprehensive Plans

▶ BP/AR 0450 - Comprehensive Safety Plan

▶ BP/AR 0460 - Local Control and Accountability Plan

▶ BP 1100 - Communication with the Public

▶ BP 1112 - Media Relations

▶ BP/AR 1220 - Citizen Advisory Committees

▶ BP/AR 3514 - Environmental Safety

▶ BP 5137 - Positive School Climate

▶ BP/AR 5141 - Healthcare and Emergencies

CSBA Policy Pillars

Every two years, CSBA adopts a Policy Platform, which provides a broad policy framework for implementing the association's mission for setting the agenda for California's preK–12 public schools and their students. The platform guides the association in its research, policy, and political leadership activities. The platform is organized into four policy pillars:

▶ Strengthen local governance

▶ Secure fair funding

▶ Improve conditions of children

▶ Ensure achievement for all

The issue of safe and supportive school environments is reflected in multiple portions of the Policy Platform. The list below highlights the connections between the platform and the topics addressed within this toolkit.

Strengthen local governance

Boards of education are the simplest expression of our democratic republic. They provide citizen governance for California's public schools and can help to advance school safety through their roles as elected officials.

1.1.2 Student support programs

Boards must have final authority for non-academic student services including safety, discipline, extracurricular programs, and programs for mental, physical, and social-emotional health.

Secure fair funding

The highest value and priority should be investing in public education and training of the next generation. Federal, state, and local government spending should reflect this critical investment, which includes equitable, full funding for a wide range of school safety-related programs.

2.1.1 Full funding

California must provide enough resources to support the actual cost of ensuring that all public school students and the LEAs who serve them perform at the highest possible levels. Funding for non-basic aid districts should be based on enrollment — the actual numbers of students served — and provide sufficient per-pupil resources to ensure the success of all California's students. California should provide LEAs with the resources for non-instructional services and infrastructure necessary for effective school operations. State and federal governments must fully fund each mandate and impose as few mandates as possible.

2.1.2 Equitable funding

Funding must be allocated to account for the actual cost of meeting the different needs of every student. This also requires the equitable distribution of funds among all LEAs, including county offices, school districts and charter schools. LEAs are responsible for the equitable distribution of resources to meet each student's needs.

Improve conditions of children

Boards realize that student wellness, support for learning, safe school environments, and access to community resources help students reach their maximum educational potential, and boards must establish policies and practices to overcome the barriers that students face.

3.2 Safe and supportive school environments

Effective teaching and learning occur when students and staff are healthy and feel safe, supported, and connected.

3.2.1 Safe schools

A positive school environment identifies and reinforces nonviolent solutions to problems and respect for all students and staff. Schools must implement fair and effective practices for student discipline, safe use of appropriate technology and media resources, and appropriate emergency response and communication plans. Schools must protect confidential student information.

3.2.2 Student health and well-being

All students benefit from coordinated programs and supports that promote mental, physical, and social-emotional health. When funding is allocated for mental and physical health programs and services for children and youth, local government entities, community organizations, and private businesses should collaborate with schools (as appropriate) to support the well-being of every student.

3.3 Family and community role in improving conditions of children

The home and community environments in which children live influence their ability to learn and thrive. Community outreach, support and partnering with families are critical strategies for improving the conditions of children.

3.3.1 Community outreach

Schools should initiate outreach for community-based support to meet the mental, physical, and social-emotional health needs of all children.

3.3.2 Partnering with families

Schools should promote the active involvement of families in supporting the mental, physical, and social-emotional health of children as critical to fostering their success in school and life.

Ensure achievement for all

Boards of education and LEAs must provide all students high-quality teaching and learning driven by curricula for post-high school success, research-based instruction, timely assessments that accurately measure student performance, and strong professional teacher development.

4.2.2 Inclusivity

Per CSBA's Equity Statement, schools should respect diversity among students and families. Learning environments should foster awareness, understanding, and acceptance of cultures, identities, and abilities through an inclusive and equity-driven curriculum.

4.4.3 Staff development

Professional development must be ongoing, relevant, and based on recognized standards for the professional development of educators. Professional development should address attitudes and perceptions of all staff about high expectations for — and the fair and equitable treatment of — every student. It must be focused on addressing the learning needs of students, including students with learning differences. Professional development activity can be enhanced by collaborative efforts among and between school districts, county offices of education, and institutions of higher education.

4.5.2 Community partnerships

Collaboration and partnerships with businesses, local government agencies, institutions of higher education, and other organizations can provide community service and service-learning activities, raise public awareness of educational needs in the community, and bring additional resources and programs to school sites.

Angela Asch, MA, focuses her research on issues concerning conditions of children, such as child development, student mental well-being, school safety, student and family engagement and empowerment, nutrition, health and physical activity. Before joining CSBA, she worked on program implementation and project management for statewide public health organizations in Sacramento and Yolo counties. She holds a Master of Arts in Child Development, and a Bachelor of Arts in Family and Consumer Sciences with an emphasis on Nutrition from California State University, Sacramento.

Dr. Sepideh Yeoh is a distinguished educator and CSBA governance consultant, with over two decades of expertise in leadership and management. Her background includes experience in higher education, student affairs, and executive coaching. Yeoh served as a trustee on the Oak Park Unified School District Board of Education, where she focuses on fostering a culture of inclusivity. She has authored three books and holds a doctorate in organizational leadership from the University of Massachusetts. Her research focuses on the leadership practices of exemplary superintendents.

Endnotes

1   Choi, S. (2019). Behind the numbers: Ending school violence and bullying. UNESCO. Retrieved from https://bit.ly/3ICAA7I.

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4   National Center for Education Statistics. (2022). Criminal Incidents Recorded by Public Schools and Those Reported to Sworn Law Enforcement. Condition of Education. U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences. Retrieved from https://bit.ly/3veV9DN.

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7   See Endnote 6.

8   Duchesneau, N. (2022, October 3). The Case for Increasing School Safety by Investing in Student Mental Health. Retrieved from https://bit.ly/4ceVkQc.

9   See Endnote 1.

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11   See Endnote 3.

12   California School Boards Association (n.d.). Climate Change Resources. CSBA. Retrieved July 28, 2023, from https://bit.ly/4cd3lVR.

Comprehensive School Safety Plans

by John Czajkowski, MM

IN THIS BRIEF:

- Components and requirements of Comprehensive School Safety Plans

- Sample questions for board members

- Relevant guidance and resources

- Relevant board policies and administrative regulations

Overview of the Comprehensive School Safety Plan

A foundational component of every local educational agency's (LEA) school safety strategy is the annual development and approval of sites' Comprehensive School Safety Plans (CSSPs). These mandated plans allow governing boards to review school safety strategies in detail. As members of the governance team, your familiarity with CSSPs is a critical way to prepare for and respond appropriately to safety issues within your schools.

What are CSSPs?

According to the California Department of Education (CDE), "California Education Code (EC) Section 32281(a) requires every kindergarten through grade twelve school, public and public charter, including community and court schools, to develop and maintain a CSSP designed to address campus risks, prepare for emergencies, and create a safe, secure learning environment for students and school personnel." LEAs with an average daily attendance of 2,500 or under may adopt a single CSSP for all schools within the district.[1]

The law requires that designated community members convene each year to review and approve their school's CSSP. Designated community members include either the School Site Council or the site's designated safety planning committee, which is to be made up of a principal/designee, teacher, parent of a child who attends the school, classified employee, and others (EC Section 32281(b)(2)). The plan must be updated and approved by **March 1 each year**. Additionally, the district and county office of education must notify the CDE by **Oct. 15** if a school has not submitted its plan. CDE provides a compliance tool on its website with requirements and recommendations to aid in the development and revision of a CSSP.[2]

Additionally, new legislation, Senate Bill (SB) 553, requires all employers with more than 10 employees to establish, implement, and maintain a workplace violence prevention plan. Best practices for LEAs would be to continue to coordinate and collaborate across departments, staff, and with partners to ensure that both the CSSP and the new Workplace Violence Prevention Plan (WVPP) are written, edited, and updated in tandem. More information on SB 553 is available in the resources section of this document.

While the law does not explicitly require that governing boards approve the plan, (merely "the district"), in practice, many governing boards review and approve the plans prior to adoption.[3] This review process offers governance teams an opportunity to consult with district staff about safety practices and provide guidance. An understanding of the plan's details also supports alignment of the budget to safety practices.

The following section provides an overview of CSSPs: the required elements, best practices for school districts and county offices of education (COEs), and relevant resources.

Required CSSP components

State law outlines the many different components CSSPs must include to address the complex issues of school safety. The following is not an exhaustive list, but rather broad categories of the different components of the plan:

- assessment of school crime or crimes at school-related functions

- procedures for reporting child abuse and neglect

- disaster procedures, routine and emergency plans, and crisis response plan with adaptations for pupils with disabilities

- procedures to allow a public agency to use school buildings, grounds, and equipment for mass care and welfare shelters during an emergency

- suspension/expulsion policies and rules and procedures on school discipline

- a discrimination and harassment policy that includes hate crime reporting procedures

- bullying and cyberbullying education and prevention strategies

- procedures for conducting tactical responses to criminal incidents, including individuals with guns on campuses and procedures for safe entrance and exit (ingress and egress) of students, parents/guardians, and school employees to and from school sites.

A full list of requirements can be found on the CDE's website here.

Components of CSSP implementation

The California Education Code has provided clear mandates for the overall process of CSSP development and approval. In 2018, Assembly Bill 1747 strengthened the existing EC requirements in several ways. Among them:

- all staff must be trained in the safety plans

- there must be cooperation with classified employees in developing the plans

- local fire departments must be consulted

- procedures for tactical responses must be included

Additionally, the bill created new requirements for the CDE to help support these state-mandated local programs.

To make the most of the CSSP, an LEA's plan should not be merely a compliance document, tucked away on a shelf and gathering dust. Developing and reviewing the plan is an opportunity for a thorough consideration of the district's or COE's approach to school safety. Referencing the board calendar is a tool that can be used to stay abreast of the review cycle.

Comprehensive safety planning requires comprehensive study

Many school safety conversations originate around topics of responding to school shootings or other dramatic emergencies. Some conversations originate around themes of prevention. Other conversations may consider infrastructure improvements. Ideally, CSSPs should consider the complete process across infrastructure, partnerships, procedures, and community. According to the California Governor's Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES), these include:

- **Prevention/mitigation:** Prevention and mitigation is any sustained action taken to reduce or eliminate long-term risk to people and property from natural- or human-caused hazards and their effects. This definition distinguishes actions that have a long-term impact from those more closely associated with immediate preparedness, response, and recovery activities.

- **Preparation:** Preparation involves activities undertaken in advance of an emergency to develop and enhance operational capacity to respond to and recover from an emergency. As part of a comprehensive preparedness program, the emergency management community (districts, counties, and tribes) should develop plans and procedures, maintain prevention programs, manage resources, establish mutual aid agreements, train personnel, and educate the schools.

- **Response:** Response activities comprise the immediate actions to save lives, protect property and the environment, and meet basic human needs. An example is evacuating school children to higher ground during a tsunami emergency. It is important to have points of contacts from the following partners: local law enforcement, fire departments, local offices of emergency services, COEs, the American Red Cross, and other local resources that can assist.

- **Recovery:** Recovery refers to actions to restore the learning environment for schools affected by an event. Recovery is an extended period that blends into the "before" timeframe of the next hazard event for a community and should include steps to build back better so that future natural hazards have lesser impacts.[4]

Since the plans must address both natural disasters as well as human threats, it is recommended that LEAs assist schools with structures and systems to help build capacity through a continuous cycle of improvement that analyzes a suitably broad spectrum of data. Multiple data points can be reviewed and analyzed. Some examples include office referrals, attendance rates and school attendance review board data, suspension and expulsion data, the California Healthy Kids Survey, school improvement plan, local law enforcement juvenile crime data, and property damage data.

LEAs should encourage and support schools in assessing comprehensive campus safety through multiple means. Beyond studying regional geographic and climate risks, schools leaders should analyze attendance and discipline records, the California Healthy Kids survey and Social Emotional Learning survey results, community criminal and incident data, (LEAs can request this information from their local law enforcement partner), and infrastructure physical assessment to help establish a wider appraisal of campus and LEA trends. This is particularly important as LEAs continue to transition out of the pandemic.

For more information and resources, see sections on emergency response and crisis communication.

CSSP best practices: School districts

School districts are responsible for the overall development of CSSPs for their schools. [EC Section 32281(a)].[5]

To align with CSSP best practices, school districts can:

- provide training, support, guidance, and oversight to schools

- maintain policies and procedures and collect relevant data

- connect and build relationships with local emergency response teams and understand their respective roles before a safety concern or disaster

- coordinate developmentally appropriate fire and active shooter/intruder drills with emergency response teams

- create a districtwide safety committee comprised of schools, first responder agencies, and school safety groups and hold regular meetings

- provide a liaison to schools to oversee and coordinate school safety planning, implementation, and emergency management

- document and track to confirm safety plan adoptions and approvals occur in a timely manner at the school and district levels

- provide a school safety plan template to all LEA sites

- encourage teacher and student participation in curriculum-based school safety planning programs

- require schools to conduct site assessments, participate in the activity at the school site, and support improvements

- annually participate in the Great California ShakeOut™ to prepare for an earthquake[6]

- partner with schools to create or improve a threat assessment team

A district's threat assessment team can also meet to identify, review, and address threats or potential threats to school safety. Threat assessment teams review incidents of threatening behavior by students (current and former), caregivers, staff, or other individuals. For more information, please refer to the Behavioral Threat Assessment section of the Safe Schools Toolkit.

CSSP best practices: County offices of education

COEs are responsible for the overall development of CSSPs for their schools including court, community, and alternative schools. [EC Section 32281(a)].[7]

To align with CSSP best practices, COEs can:

- provide training, support, and oversight

- maintain policies and procedures

- collect applicable data and connect with education agencies

- ensure that COE-operated schools coordinate with partnering agencies in the development of CSSPs

- require districts to verify that schools in their jurisdictions have compliant CSSPs

- host countywide safety committee meetings and trainings; communicate with safety directors and coordinators in districts and schools

- create and maintain relationships with law enforcement, fire representatives, local business, and community partners

- utilize online and in-person trainings offered by the Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools (REMS) Technical Assistance Center[8]

- annually participate in the Great California ShakeOut™ to prepare for the next earthquake[9]

Authentic collaboration helps foster physical and school climate safety

Although physical infrastructure helps foster school safety, comprehensive safety in education settings is characterized by a symbiotic relationship between both the physical and the behavioral human elements of safety — mental, emotional, psychological, and social. Thus, developing schools safety plans that are truly comprehensive requires authentic input from a range of employees, students, and parents, along with guidance from local law enforcement and fire department partners. It is recommended that governance teams encourage site leaders to foster an authentic team-based process for collaboration rather than one that is strictly "top-down."

For example, districts can adopt training programs that encourage group participation, including a train-the-trainer program for various safety committee members, school staff, and administrators. The training can include drafting CSSP goals, role playing, and presentations on threat reporting and assessment, Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS), crisis communication, substance awareness, de-escalation, and reunification.

Documenting an authentic collaborative process

Districts, ideally working in conjunction with COEs, are encouraged to provide CSSP templates that house all standardized elements with areas of site input, from straightforward elements to those that require more collaboration, creativity, and innovation through the site team. It is a best practice to house these documents in a standardized, centralized, and digital platform that can be easily revised at district and site levels.

LEAs might consider providing clear timelines for completion and structured support. Furthermore, LEAs are advised to review and critique the plans through a centralized internal process before sending them to governing boards or superintendents for approval prior to the annual March 1 deadline. A centralized accountability system places a responsibility on the LEA to support the sites with training and resources. Governance team members should inquire about the process to clarify if there are ways to improve engagement in CSSP development.

Protect sensitive information in posted plans

While California Education Code requires that LEAs make their CSSP available to the public, not all components should be included. Access to CSSPs must be carefully controlled to protect sensitive tactical information such as specific response protocols, private personal information such as cell phone numbers, student information such as evacuation care instructions for students with disabilities, and other items that would be inappropriate to post publicly.

It is recommended that LEAs provide a redacted version to help share key elements with the community in a controlled manner without compromising the aforementioned details. The large size of a typical CSSP makes for an unwieldy document in its totality, so it is recommended that key quick reference sections are made available to site administration through various means that balance rapid access with information management.

Help schools prioritize

Not all emergencies move at the same speed or have the same potential scope of impact, so it is recommended that LEAs help schools build capacity to respond competently to the most fast-moving situations at times when prevention has not been successful, or even possible. In a state with as much geographic, climate, and social diversity as California, some regions may need to plan for coastal flooding, whereas others may need to plan more for wildfires, and others for a possible dam failure. Some larger LEAs may need to be ready for several potential disasters, such as for an earthquake or an active shooter.

District leaders must distinguish between having a CSSP with merely an exhaustive selection of protocols on paper versus one that authentically expresses the extended network of school leadership, staff, and first responders working together over time to build real capacity to better prepare for natural disasters and human emergencies.

State and national resources

The CDE has provided a collection of resources on the Safe Schools Planning website that includes summaries of mandates, compliance checklists, and more. This valuable CDE resource provides elements to help LEAs protect not only physical safety, but school climate — which has a profound relationship with the former. Additionally, the U.S. Department of Education's Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools website is an outstanding source of regularly updated general guidance, training materials, and many other resources.

CSSP implementation considerations and processes should be substantively supported by the LEA to help interpret and structure the copious guidance available. The LEA will not be the only resource provider, but it ultimately must approve the plans.

A best practice is for the LEA to provide a template, trainings, and structured goal-setting opportunities. The district provides timelines and supports for the site to develop and complete, and then provides review, feedback, and evaluation prior to the approval process. This is a time-consuming process and requires knowledgeable leadership and vision. Ideally, large LEAs should consider a dedicated role for the broad functions of a safety and security administrator (director, coordinator, program manager, manager, or similar). For smaller districts, CSSPs may be difficult and time consuming due to existing staff capacities, and education leaders may wish to seek assistance from their county office of education or contract with a recommended professional with experience in safety planning.

Questions for governance teams to consider

CSSPs cover a wide spectrum of safety aspects including infrastructure, protocol, climate, partnerships, community, and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) prevention-through-recovery continuum. The following questions are meant to help guide discussions on safety. For more information, please see the Options-Based Response section of the School Safety Toolkit to find more in-depth guidance and information on comprehensive safety.

Staffing and internal coordination

1) Is there an LEA representative identified to oversee the CSSP process?

2) Given the broad scope of CSSPs, are all the related district departments able to collaborate and support developing appropriate, current, and standardized content?

3) At the site level, are all employee groups able to collaborate?

4) Is there support for the unique and specific needs at each school site?

5) How are student and community input incorporated into the planning process?

Partnerships and external coordination

1) Are all relevant law enforcement and fire responders able to provide input to the CSSP development process? If not, how might we improve collaboration with the necessary partners?

Balanced content for CSSPs

1) Do the contents of the CSSP help address the complete process of prevention, mitigation, preparation, response, and recovery?

2) Do the contents consider these phases across areas of infrastructure, partnerships, procedures, and community?

3) Do the plans address items required by law and also those recommended by our board policies and administrative regulations?

LEA support and documentation

1) Does the LEA support school sites over the full process of plan development, local assessment, professional development, training, drills, documentation, and plan approval? If not, what can we do to address the necessary improvements?

2) Is there sufficient time allocated on the governance calendar for board review of the plans before the March 1 submission deadline?

Relevant resources

State and federal resources

Assembly Bill 1747 (2018) — School safety plans

AB 1747 requires schools to develop safety plans to prepare and respond to safety threats or incidents on or near school sites. By establishing safety guidelines which focus on preparedness, with assistance from the CDE and Department of Justice, schools can enhance their learning environment for all students. The entirety of text of the bill can be found here: https://bit.ly/3T8KN00.

Senate Bill 10 (2023) — Pupil health: opioid overdose prevention and treatment: Melanie's Law

SB 10 requires the CSSP for schools that serve students in any of grades 7-12 to include a protocol if a student is suffering or is reasonably believed to be suffering from an opioid overdose. https://csba.pub/4cdw10X

Senate Bill 671 (2023) — School safety plans: dangerous, violent, or unlawful activities

SB 671 requires CSSPs to include procedures to assess and respond to reports of any dangerous, violent or unlawful activity conducted or threatened to be conducted at the school, at an activity sponsored by the school, or on a school bus serving the school. https://bit.ly/44zS0LV

Senate Bill 323 (2023–24) — Comprehensive School Safety Plans: Individualized safety plans

SB 323 requires disaster procedures to also include adaptations for pupils with disabilities in accordance with the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and Section 504 of the federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and would require the annual evaluation of the CSSP and the annual review of a charter school's school safety plan to also include ensuring that the plan includes appropriate adaptations for pupils with disabilities, as specified. https://bit.ly/43eeQIz

Senate Bill 553 (2023-24) — Occupational safety: workplace violence: restraining orders and workplace violence prevention plan

SB 553 requires an employer to establish, implement, and maintain an effective workplace violence prevention plan, to provide training for employees on the plan, and to provide additional training when the plan is updated, or a new workplace violence hazard has been identified. The entirety of text of the bill can be found here: Bill Text - SB-553 https://csba.pub/3U62cse

Safe schools planning resources from the CDE

The information provided on this website is intended to help schools identify elements and resources important in improving school climate and safety. https://bit.ly/3IBviZN

California School Climate, Health, and Learning Surveys

A tool supported by the CDE to help LEAs meet Local Control and Accountability Plan priorities to improve school climate, pupil engagement, parent involvement, and academic achievement. https://bit.ly/4cgly4U

Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools (REMS)

The U.S. Department of Education's Office of Safe and Supportive Schools has administered the REMS Technical Assistance (TA) Center to serve two critical functions aimed at helping education agencies, with their community partners, manage safety, security, and emergency management programs. The site is intended to build the preparedness capacity (including prevention, protection, mitigation, response, and recovery efforts) of schools, school districts, Institutions of Higher Education (IHEs), and their community partners at the local, state, and federal levels. It also serves as the primary source of information dissemination for schools, school districts, and IHEs for emergencies via the REMS Technical Assistance Center website. https://bit.ly/3TjsTI2

REMS: The Role of Districts in Developing High-Quality School Emergency Plans

The Role of Districts in Developing High-Quality School Emergency Operations Plans (EOPs): A Companion to the School Guide is a guide for districts to fulfill both their individual and shared emergency management planning responsibilities in school EOP development for a range of threats and hazards. The intended audience of this guidance document is school safety leaders and members of core planning teams at school districts. The district guide complements the *Guide for Developing High-Quality School Emergency Operations Plans* and recommends specific roles and responsibilities for school district-level administrators and staff. https://bit.ly/3v73F7V

Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA): School Security Assessment Tool (SSAT)

The SSAT is designed to inform the school safety planning process by assessing existing security measures and associated supports and opportunities for improvement. https://bit.ly/3Tz0RJX

Office of Elementary and Secondary Education School Emergency Response to Violence (Project SERV)

Under the Project SERV grant, provides short-term support after a traumatic event to affected LEAs or institutions of higher education. These grants are intended to provide a limited amount of funds to meet acute needs and restore the learning environment. At the discretion of the Secretary, funding amounts and project periods may be established (subject to the availability of appropriations) to reflect the scope of the incident and potential recovery needs. https://bit.ly/4cgZln0

CSBA's Golden Bell Award winners

The Golden Bell Award recognizes programs that effectively prevent or reduce school violence by promoting a safe, positive school climate and by teaching students to resolve conflicts. These may also include other prevention or intervention strategies such as programs that promote school safety using planning, monitoring, and assessment tools; programs that support students' sense of belonging and engagement in order to increase motivation and achievement; and successful efforts to reduce school suspensions and expulsions.

Golden Bell Awards 2022 (csba.org) https://bit.ly/43eaX6l

Golden Bell Awards 2021 (csba.org) https://bit.ly/3IzqS5N

Golden Bell Awards 2020 (csba.org) https://bit.ly/3Ve9HOv

Relevant CSBA board policies and administrative regulations

CSBA GAMUT Policy and Policy *Plus* subscribers have access to sample policies. The following are sample policies and administrative regulations that are relevant to comprehensive school safety plans.

‣ BP 0000 - Vision

‣ BP 0100 - Philosophy

‣ BP 0200 - Goals for the District

‣ BP 0400 - Comprehensive Plans

‣ BP/AR 0450 - Comprehensive Safety Plan

‣ BP/AR 1250 - Visitors/Outsiders

‣ BP/AR 3514 - Environmental Safety

‣ BP/AR 3515 - Campus Security

‣ BP/AR 3515.2 - Disruptions

‣ BP/AR 3515.3 - District Police/Security Department

‣ BP/AR 3516 - Emergency and Disaster Preparedness

‣ BP 4131 - Staff Development

‣ BP/AR 4157 - Employee Safety

‣ AR 4157.1 - Work Related Injuries

‣ BP/AR 4158 - Employee Security

‣ BP 4231 - Staff Development

‣ BP/AR 4257 - Employee Safety

‣ AR 4257.1 - Work Related Injuries

‣ BP/AR 4258 - Employee Security

‣ BP 4331 - Staff Development

‣ BP/AR 4357 - Employee Safety

‣ AR 4357.1 - Work Related Injuries

‣ BP/AR 4358 - Employee Security

‣ BP 5112.5 - Open/Closed Campus

‣ BP/AR 5131.7 - Weapons and Dangerous Instruments

‣ BP/AR 5136 - Gangs

‣ BP 5137 - Positive School Climate

‣ BP/AR 5141 - Health Care and Emergencies

‣ BP/AR 5142 - Safety

‣ BP 5145.11 - Questioning and Apprehension by Law Enforcement

‣ BP/AR 5145.12 - Search and Seizure

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Endnotes

1   California Department of Education (2023, June 14). *Safe Schools Planning*. Retrieved July 27, 2023, from https://bit.ly/3IBviZN.

2   California Department of Education (2022, August 19). *Comprehensive School Safety Plans*. Retrieved July 27, 2023, from https://bit.ly/3TaMxWK.

3   A.B. 1747— California State Legislature (2017-2018) School Safety Plans. (2018, September 27). https://bit.ly/3T8KN00.

4   Cal OES Governor's Office of Emergency Services. (2023). *CALIFORNIA EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT FOR SCHOOLS: A Guide for Districts and Sites*. Retrieved from https://bit.ly/3TKnZFL.

5   See Endnote 2.

6   Earthquake Country Alliance (n.d.). *GET READY TO SHAKEOUT!* The Great California Shake Out. Retrieved July 28, 2023, from https://bit.ly/3Tf0jYr.

7   See Endnote 2.

8   Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools REMS Technical Assistance Center (2022, September 27). Retrieved from https://bit.ly/3IxDDOe.

9   See Endnote 6.

Supporting a Positive School Climate

by Derby Pattengill

IN THIS BRIEF:

▸ Components and best practices of a positive school climate

▸ Sample questions for board members

▸ Relevant guidance and resources

▸ Relevant sample policies and administrative regulations

Introduction

A positive school climate can be a powerful strategy for preventing bullying and harassment. When students, staff, and administrators work together to foster an inclusive and respectful environment, it becomes more difficult for bullying and harassment to take root.

This document serves as a companion resource to the October 2023 CSBA brief, "School Safety: Bullying and cyberbullying," by providing information about how board members can foster positive school climates through governance strategies. By creating a positive school climate, students are more likely to feel safe, respected, and supported, which in turn may reduce the prevalence of bullying and harassment within school communities.

Strategies for supporting a positive school climate

Creating a positive TK-12 school environment is crucial for students' well-being and academic success. The following practices and strategies, supported by cited resources, can contribute to nurturing the well-being and success of all students.

Local educational agencies (LEAs) can enhance the effect of a positive school climate as a safety strategy by:

Setting expectations from the top

▸ **Modeling respectful behavior:** Boards of education should set the expectation that they, teachers and staff model respectful behavior toward each other and students. This includes respectful language, active listening, and empathy in interactions.

▸ **Enforcing expectations that bullying and harassment are unacceptable:** LEA leaders should clearly communicate that bullying and harassment will not be tolerated in any form. This includes actions by students, staff, teachers, fellow board members, and parents/guardians. LEA leaders should consistently enforce consequences for those who engage in such behavior.

▸ **Promoting inclusivity and diversity:** Boards can support schools in their efforts to implement diversity and inclusion programs that celebrate diverse cultures, religions, and backgrounds. Boards can allocate professional development funds for anti-bias training to be aware of explicit and implicit messages they communicate to students and families. Boards can seek input from students and families to support inclusivity and diversity and follow up with the district community about actions taken. Staff can organize districtwide events to raise awareness and appreciation for diversity. Inclusive educational practices also ensure that students with disabilities and English learners are integrated into general education classrooms, promoting diversity, empathy, and understanding among all students.[1]

Establishing, monitoring, and reviewing local policies

▸ **Establishing clear anti-bullying policies:** Develop and publicize a comprehensive LEA-wide anti-bullying policy that outlines the consequences for perpetrators and the support available for victims, in compliance with California law. Make sure the policy is developed in conjunction with stakeholders, including students, staff, teachers, and parents/guardians. It should be made widely known and easily accessible in languages appropriate for the LEA, as required by California Education Code (EC) § 200. CSBA has developed sample Board Policy (BP) and

Administrative Regulation (AR) 5131.2- Bullying, which LEAs can adapt for their specific policies and practices.

‣ **Regularly assessing and adapting local initiatives:** LEAs can conduct surveys or focus groups to gather feedback from students and staff about the school climate. Boards can use this feedback to make necessary adjustments to policies and practices.

Allocating resources and time for professional learning

‣ **Continuous professional development:** Boards should allocate resources to provide training and professional development opportunities for teachers and staff on recognizing, addressing, and preventing bullying and harassment. This may entail inclusion in the Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP) under State Priority 6, School Climate.

Supporting effective student discipline practices

‣ **Promoting positive behavior through Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS):** This is a proactive approach to behavior management that promotes positive behaviors and creates a culture of respect and responsibility in schools.[2] LEAs can implement a PBIS program to acknowledge and reward positive behavior, thus creating a school culture where kindness and respect are encouraged and recognized. More information on how to implement PBIS is available through the U.S. Department of Education and the Center for PBIS. See page 4 for additional information about PBIS.

‣ **Promoting restorative practices:** Restorative practices focus on building positive relationships within the school community and repairing harm when it occurs. This approach fosters a sense of belonging and accountability among students.[3] Restorative practices can include restorative circles or conferences to address conflicts and harm caused by bullying or harassment. This approach focuses on repairing relationships and building empathy. Boards can support this work by ensuring educators have resources for professional learning and establishing clear policies about student discipline. They can also encourage staff to provide learning opportunities for students and their families/guardians about restorative practices.

Assembly Bill 1165 added subdivision (c) to EC 49000.5 that states, "(c) For a pupil who has been suspended, or for whom other means of correction have been implemented pursuant to subdivision (b), for an incident of racist bullying, harassment, or intimidation, local educational agencies are encouraged to have both the victim and perpetrator engage in a restorative justice practice that is found to suit the needs of both the victim and the perpetrator. Local educational agencies are encouraged to regularly check on the victim of racist bullying, harassment, or intimidation to ensure that the victim is not in danger of suffering from long-lasting mental health issues. Local educational

agencies are encouraged to require perpetrators to engage in culturally sensitive programs that promote racial justice and equity and combat racism and ignorance." See page 5 for additional information about restorative practices in schools.

‣ **Positive discipline and classroom management:** Positive discipline in the classroom is a method that emphasizes positive and respectful interactions between teachers and students. It is based on research and provides teachers with a framework to create a positive classroom environment conducive to learning and personal growth.[4] Further, Senate Bill 274 extended "the prohibition against the suspension of pupils enrolled in any of grades 6 to 8, inclusive, including those pupils enrolled in a charter school, for disrupting school activities or otherwise willfully defying the valid authority of supervisors, teachers, administrators, school officials, or other school personnel engaged in the performance of their duties to all grades, by 4 years to instead be until July 1, 2029, and, commencing July 1, 2024, would prohibit the suspension of pupils enrolled in any of grades 9 to 12, inclusive, including those pupils enrolled in a charter school, for those acts until July 1, 2029, but would retain a teacher's existing authorization to suspend any pupil in any grade from class for any of the listed acts, including willful defiance, for the day of the suspension and the day following, as provided."

‣ **Conflict-resolution programs:** Implementing conflict resolution programs can empower students by giving them skills to resolve disputes peacefully, leading to a more harmonious school environment.[5]

Selecting curricula that fosters a positive school climate

‣ **Providing social-emotional learning (SEL):** Governing boards are responsible for adopting the LEA's curricula and can direct the superintendent to have staff research and incorporate SEL curricula that teach students empathy, conflict-resolution, and emotional-regulation skills. Examples of existing programs include Second Step or Character Education. The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) provides resources and research on how to implement SEL in schools, promoting emotional well-being and interpersonal skills. SEL is discussed further on page 3.

Family and student engagement and education

‣ **Fostering student leadership:** Encouraging students to have a voice in school decision making and leadership roles can empower them and create a more inclusive and positive school environment.[6] Additionally, having a student board member benefits the governing board, the student representative, and the LEA's community. Student board members empower boards to include student voices in their responsibilities, and students get the opportunity to meaningfully participate in the

governance process, learn essential democratic skills, and represent and advocate for their peers.[7] LEA staff can encourage the creation of student-led committees or clubs dedicated to promoting kindness and preventing bullying. These groups can organize events, campaigns, and initiatives. Boards can assist by providing resources and recognizing student-led initiatives.

▶ **Providing education to parents and guardians:** LEAs can hold regular meetings and workshops with parents to educate them about the school's anti-bullying efforts and provide resources for addressing bullying at home. These meetings and workshops will be most effective if they are in a language that parents and guardians can understand and are sensitive to students' and families' cultures.

▶ **Including parents and guardians in decision making:** Engaging parents and the community in school activities and decision-making processes can enhance the overall school environment and support student success.[8]

▶ **Raising awareness about bullying:** Boards can provide resources and support for staff to conduct workshops and awareness campaigns on bullying, cyberbullying, and harassment that include students, staff, and families/guardians. Developing a districtwide framework for creating systemic change by building a school climate that discourages bullying and addresses it effectively, if it occurs.[9] Staff can invite guest speakers, survivors, or experts to share their experiences and knowledge.

▶ **Empowering bystanders:** Boards can support programs that teach students and staff how to intervene when they witness bullying or harassment. Consider programs like the Upstander initiative, where students are encouraged to stand up for victims.

Providing student mental health supports

▶ **Offering counseling and support services:** LEAs should work to ensure that school counselors are available and trained to provide emotional support to victims and perpetrators of bullying. Boards can support these efforts through resource allocation and policy development that make it possible to provide access to mental health services for all students.

Using LCAPs to support positive school climate

California's Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) and LCAPs play a crucial role in fostering a positive school environment. The LCFF's emphasis on equitable resource allocation directs additional funding to schools with higher proportions of students facing challenges, facilitating the implementation of targeted initiatives to enhance the overall school experience. Within the LCAPs, the priority area of "school climate" explicitly addresses the creation of a positive and inclusive atmosphere, focusing on factors such as social-emotional learning, behavioral support services, and community engagement.

The LCAP community engagement process is also a helpful way to involve students, parents, staff, and other stakeholders in developing effective strategies to enhance a positive school climate. It is a helpful way to inform stakeholders about the tools and strategies available, solicit feedback, and raise awareness about efforts the LEA is making to create a positive school environment.

By encouraging LEAs to prioritize student well-being and engagement, the LCFF and LCAPs underscore the commitment to cultivating safe, supportive, and enriching school environments that contribute to the holistic development of all students. Some ways in which a positive school climate might be reflected in an LCAP include, but are not limited to:

▶ **Social-emotional learning:** LEAs may include plans to implement or expand SEL programs aimed at fostering students' emotional well-being, interpersonal skills, and resilience.

▶ **Behavioral-support services:** LCAPs may outline strategies for providing Behavioral-support services such as a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) to address the social-emotional needs of students, including counseling, mentoring, or intervention programs.

▶ **Bullying prevention and intervention:** Initiatives to prevent and address bullying or harassment may be part of the plan, reflecting a commitment to creating a safe and inclusive environment for all students.

▶ **Community engagement:** Strategies for involving parents, families, and community members in creating a positive school climate may be highlighted in the LCAP, recognizing the importance of collaboration in fostering a supportive educational community.

▶ **Professional development:** Plans for professional learning for teachers and staff may include training on creating a positive school climate, implementing restorative practices, and supporting students' social-emotional development.

▶ **Equity and inclusivity:** The LCAP may address efforts to promote equity and inclusivity, ensuring that all students, regardless of background, feel valued and included in the school community.

▶ **Safety measures:** Strategies to enhance the physical and emotional safety of students, such as implementing safety protocols, may be part of the plan.

▶ **Student and parent surveys:** Some LEAs include data from student and parent surveys as indicators of school climate, providing a way to assess perceptions of safety, support, and engagement within the school community.

Social-emotional learning

SEL is a powerful strategy to mitigate the negative effects of bullying and harassment on the K-12 school climate. SEL equips students with the skills needed to navigate and cope with these challenges effectively. By integrating SEL into the curriculum and school culture,

educators can help students develop the emotional and interpersonal skills needed to cope with and mitigate the negative effects of bullying and harassment on school climate. Some ways that SEL can be used for this purpose include:

▸ **Improved emotional regulation:** SEL teaches students emotional-regulation skills, enabling them to manage their emotions in the face of bullying and harassment, reducing emotional distress and maintaining a more positive outlook.[10]

▸ **Increased empathy and understanding:** SEL fosters empathy and a better understanding of others' feelings and experiences. This can promote a more supportive and compassionate school climate.[11]

▸ **Enhanced interpersonal skills:** SEL equips students with essential interpersonal skills — such as active listening, conflict resolution, and communication — which can help prevent and address conflicts related to bullying and harassment.[12]

▸ **Strengthened resilience:** SEL enhances resilience by teaching students how to bounce back from adversity. This resilience can help students cope with the negative effects of bullying and harassment and maintain a positive attitude.[13]

▸ **Promotion of responsible decision making:** SEL encourages responsible decision making, which includes choosing not to engage in bullying or harassment and instead resolving conflicts through nonviolent means.[14]

▸ **Fostering positive relationships:** SEL helps students build positive relationships, which can lead to a stronger sense of belonging and support in the face of bullying or harassment.[15]

▸ **Empowering bystanders:** SEL empowers students to become bystanders who are willing and capable of intervening when they witness bullying or harassment, thus creating a safer and more supportive school climate.[16]

SEL and the California health curriculum

In the California K-12 health curriculum, there are multiple opportunities for alignment with SEL. SEL focuses on developing skills such as self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making. Areas within the health curriculum where alignment with SEL may occur include:

▸ **Emotional and mental health education:** Health education often includes components that address emotional and mental health. Topics such as stress management, coping strategies, and understanding emotions provide opportunities for SEL skill development.

▸ **Communication skills:** Health curriculum may emphasize effective communication skills, which align with SEL's focus on relationship skills. Students may learn how to express themselves, listen actively, and navigate interpersonal interactions.

▸ **Conflict resolution:** Health education can address conflict-resolution strategies, teaching students how to manage disagreements and navigate relationships positively. These skills align closely with SEL competencies.

▸ **Decision-making skills:** The health curriculum often includes content related to making healthy decisions. SEL principles, particularly responsible decision making, can be reinforced as students learn to make choices that positively impact their well-being.

▸ **Bullying prevention:** Health education may cover topics related to bullying prevention, fostering social awareness and empathy. SEL principles encourage understanding others' perspectives and promoting positive relationships.

▸ **Substance abuse prevention:** Substance abuse prevention programs within the health curriculum can incorporate SEL by addressing the emotional and social factors related to decision making and peer influence.

▸ **Personal and social responsibility:** Health education often emphasizes personal and social responsibility for one's health. This aligns with SEL's focus on self-management and responsible decision making.

By intentionally connecting SEL principles with the health curriculum, educators can create a more comprehensive and holistic learning experience for students, fostering not only physical health but also the social and emotional skills crucial for overall well-being.

Positive Behavior Interventions and Support

PBIS is a proactive and systemic approach to promoting positive behavior in schools. It aims to create a school environment that fosters social and emotional well-being, prevents behavior issues, and enhances overall learning. By implementing PBIS, schools can create a more positive and supportive environment for students, improving behavior, reducing discipline problems, and enhancing overall academic success. These cited resources provide further insights and guidance on the implementation of PBIS.
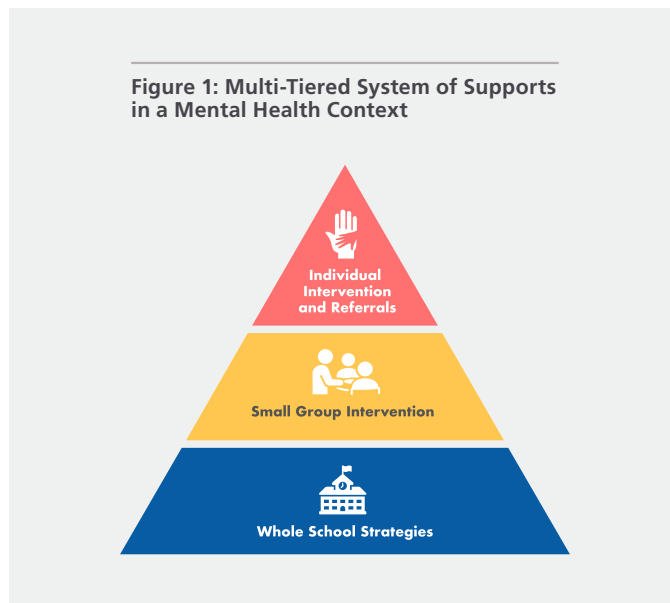
The basics of a PBIS program are outlined by the U.S. Department of Education and The Center on PBIS and include:

▸ **Establishing a schoolwide framework:** A schoolwide framework outlines clear behavioral expectations, reinforces positive behavior, and provides support for all students is adopted.[17]

▸ **Define clear behavioral expectations:** A small set of clear, positively stated behavioral expectations that apply to all students in all settings are defined. These expectations serve as the foundation for the PBIS program.[18]

▸ **Teaching and reinforcing expected behaviors:** Teaching and reinforcing the expected behaviors through various strategies such as direct instruction, modeling, and recognition programs.[19]

- **Data-driven decision making:** Data is used to inform decision making. Schools collect data on behavior and outcomes to assess the effectiveness of their interventions and adjust, as necessary.[20]

- **Tiered levels of support:** MTSS is often utilized. Tier 1 includes universal interventions for all students, while Tier 2 and Tier 3 provide more targeted support for students who require additional assistance.[21]

- **Positive reinforcement and recognition:** The use of positive reinforcement, such as praise, rewards, and recognition, is emphasized to encourage and maintain desired behaviors.[22]

- **Consistency and collaboration:** Consistent implementation of PBIS across all staff is vital. Schools should encourage collaboration among teachers, administrators, and support staff to ensure a unified approach.[23]

- **Regular evaluation and ongoing improvement:** Continuous evaluation of the effectiveness of their PBIS program with necessary adjustments to improve outcomes and maintain a positive school climate.[24]

Multi-Tiered System of Supports

MTSS is a comprehensive framework designed to enhance educational outcomes by providing a systematic approach to meeting the diverse needs of all students. MTSS integrates academic, behavioral, and social-emotional support systems, organizing interventions into three tiers based on the intensity of student needs (see Figure 1). The three tiers are: *universal* — all students receive foundational support; *targeted,* in which support is provided for students that need additional assistance; and *intensive*, where support is provided to students with urgent needs. This proactive approach emphasizes early identification of challenges, evidence-based interventions, and continuous monitoring of progress. Multiple data points are used to identify needs and monitoring progress helps site leaders evaluate and adjust resources as needed. By adopting MTSS, LEAs can systematically address the unique learning needs of every student, promoting a culture of inclusivity and ensuring that all learners receive the necessary support to succeed academically and thrive in a positive and supportive school environment.[25]

Figure 1: Multi-Tiered System of Supports in a Mental Health Context

Individual Intervention and Referrals

Small Group Intervention

Whole School Strategies

Restorative practices

Restorative practices are a philosophy and set of strategies that prioritize building and repairing relationships within a community, often applied in the context of schools and criminal justice systems. Originating in indigenous cultures, particularly the Māori people of New Zealand and First Nations in North America, restorative practices focus on resolving conflicts, repairing harm, and fostering a sense of community through open communication, empathy, and accountability.[26] The practices were formalized in the 1970s, with the emergence of restorative justice principles in the criminal justice field. However, the broader application to education and other community settings gained momentum in the late-20th and early 21st centuries. The goal is to create environments where individuals feel heard, valued, and connected, leading to improved social interactions, reduced disciplinary issues, and a positive communal atmosphere. Restorative practices have since been embraced globally as an effective and transformative approach to community building and conflict resolution.

Restorative practices in K-12 schools offer a transformative approach to discipline and community building, focusing on repairing harm and fostering positive relationships.[27] By prioritizing open communication, empathy, and accountability, restorative practices contribute to a more inclusive and supportive school environment. Some key benefits of implementing restorative practices throughout an LEA include:

- **Conflict resolution:** Restorative practices provide a structured framework for resolving conflicts, allowing students and staff to address issues collaboratively and find mutually agreeable solutions.

- **Building positive relationships:** By emphasizing dialogue and understanding, restorative practices help build strong, positive relationships among students, teachers, and administrators, creating a sense of belonging and community.

- **Reducing discipline disparities:** Restorative practices have been shown to reduce disciplinary disparities, ensuring that all students are treated fairly and equitably, regardless of background or identity.

- **Improved school climate:** Implementing restorative practices contributes to a more positive school climate, fostering a sense of safety and trust that is conducive to effective teaching and learning.

- **Enhanced social-emotional learning:** Restorative practices support SEL by helping students develop crucial skills such as empathy, self-awareness, and responsible decision making.

Collective impact approach

Bullying is a rapidly increasing and complex problem that impacts students, families, schools, and the community. All institutions, organizations, and individuals inside and outside schools — governing boards, school staff, parents, students, community-based organizations, local government, and state and federal leaders — must accept responsibility for the critical role they play in bullying prevention and intervention and ensuring positive outcomes for all students. CSBA encourages governance teams to consider the assets and resources within their community that can support the district's efforts around school safety and bullying prevention, and work to develop and implement processes that allow for purposeful collaboration and partnerships. Governance teams have an opportunity to advocate for alignment between the LEA and the community — to engage and lead the community toward a shared vision for student success.

Questions for governance teams to consider

As the governance team discusses the issue of bullying and how to create a safe school environment for all students, it might consider the following questions:

Setting direction

- What does the research show about the relationship between a safe, supportive, and welcoming school environment and student attendance, engagement, and achievement?

- What does the assessment of existing conditions in our schools, district or county office of education, and community tell us about the needs of our students and opportunities for effective strategies?

- How is a positive school climate currently addressed in LCAPs across the LEA? What metrics are being employed to measure the effectiveness of current programs and practices?

Establishing effective structures

- Do board policies and administrative regulations comply with current legislation, focus on student learning and achievement, and promote, support, and create safe, supportive school environments?

Providing support

- Does our LEA have a professional development plan to support school staff in implementing the board policies and administrative regulations?

Ensuring accountability

- What indicators can be used to assess the effectiveness of our district's safety-related policies and practices?

Leading the community

- What opportunities are there to incorporate student, parent, and community input into the LEA's safety policies, curricula, and strategies?

- Who are the key community organizations, agencies, and individuals who can help support collaborative solutions to creating a safe, supportive school and community environment?

Relevant resources

American Psychological Association

This primer on bullying is designed to help teachers respond to students who may need support. It is not intended as a diagnostic tool or to replace formal assessments employed by mental health professionals. It is important to consider the context of the situation, individual differences, and cultural and linguistic considerations. https://bit.ly/3Pgyzla

California Department of Education – Bullying Prevention and Training Resources

Bullying prevention training materials, publications, and resources, including community-based organizations, for educators, parents, and community members for recognizing bullying behavior and approaches for determining how to respond. https://bit.ly/4cg9n83

Centers for Disease Control – Youth Risk Behavior Survey

CDC's *Youth Risk Behavior Survey Data Summary & Trends Report: 2011–21* provides surveillance data from 2021, as well as 10-year trends from 2011 through 2021, on behaviors and experiences among high school students in the United States related to health and well-being. https://bit.ly/43fjCoY

NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness)

NAMI, the National Alliance on Mental Illness, is the nation's largest grassroots mental health organization dedicated to building better lives for the millions of Americans affected by mental illness. https://bit.ly/43jie4N

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

Parents, school staff, and other adults in the community can help kids prevent bullying by talking about it, building a safe school environment, and creating a communitywide bullying prevention strategy. https://bit.ly/4ccnYkZ

Student engagement and well-being in California 2019–21

Key findings from the 18th biennial California Healthy Kids Survey. https://bit.ly/48SYwxW

California Healthy Kids Survey 2022–23

A comprehensive student data collection system that addresses school climate, health risks and behaviors, and youth resiliency. https://bit.ly/4cdYdRi

International Institute for Restorative Practices (IIRP)

Restorative practices explained. https://bit.ly/3IzL2wo

Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL)

CASEL's guide on restorative practices describes how restorative practices can align to an approach to schoolwide SEL, how they are mutually supportive, and how to implement both in an integrated way. https://bit.ly/3IDC814

California Department of Education (CDE) – SEL Resource Guide

Social and Emotional Learning in California: A Guide to Resources is a project of the CDE SEL State Team, a State Superintendent of Public Instruction initiative, catalyzed by California's participation in CASEL's Collaborating States Initiative. https://bit.ly/3PmXXFH

CDE health education content standards

PDF copy of standards. https://bit.ly/49SyxYH

Searchable database of standards: https://bit.ly/3wV6WI1

National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments (NCSSLE)

NCSSLE offers information and technical assistance to states, districts, schools, institutions of higher education, and communities focused on improving school climate and conditions for learning. Resources and support for educational stakeholders to collaborate to sustain safe, engaging, and healthy school environments that support student academic success. https://bit.ly/43fENr4

Relevant CSBA sample policies and administrative regulations

CSBA *GAMUT Policy and Policy Plus* subscribers have access to the most up-to-date CSBA sample policy language. The following are sample board policies and administrative regulations that have been developed in compliance with California laws and address school climate, bullying, and discipline:

‣ BP 0100 - Philosophy

‣ BP 0410 - Nondiscrimination in District Programs and Activities

‣ BP 0415 - Equity

‣ BP/AR 0450 - Comprehensive Safety Plan

‣ BP/AR 0460 - Local Control and Accountability Plan

‣ BP/AR 1220 - Citizen Advisory Committees

‣ BP/AR/E(1) 1312.2 - Complaints Concerning Instructional Materials

‣ BP/AR 1312.3 - Uniform Complaint Procedures

‣ AR/E(1)/E(2) - Williams Uniform Complaint Procedures

‣ BP 1313 - Civility

‣ BP 2111 - Superintendent Governance Standards

‣ BP 2230 - Representative and Deliberative Groups

‣ BP 3513.4 - Drug and Alcohol-Free Schools

‣ BP/AR 3515 - Campus Security

‣ BP 3515.31 - School Resource Officers

‣ BP 4119.21/4219.21/4319.21 - Professional Standards

‣ BP 4231 - Staff Development

‣ BP/AR 5131.2 - Bullying

‣ BP 5137 - Positive School Climate

‣ BP 5138 - Conflict Resolution/Peer Mediation

‣ BP 5141.5 - Mental Health

‣ BP/AR 5141.52 - Suicide Prevention

‣ BP/AR 5136 - Gangs

‣ BP/AR 5142 - Safety

‣ BP/AR 5144 - Discipline

‣ BP/AR 5144.1 - Suspension and Expulsion/Due Process

- AR 5144.2 - Suspension and Expulsion/Due Process (Students with Disabilities)
- BP 5145.9 - Hate-Motivated Behavior
- BP 6120 - Response to Instruction and Intervention
- BP/AR 6141.2 - Recognition of Religious Beliefs and Customs
- BP/AR 6142.1 - Sexual Health and HIV/AIDS Prevention Instruction
- BP 6142.5 - Environmental Education
- BP/AR 6142.7 - Physical Education and Activity
- BP/AR 6142.8 - Comprehensive Health Education
- BP/AR 6143 - Courses of Study
- BP 6144 - Controversial Issues
- BP/AR/E(1) - 6161.1 - Selection and Evaluation of Instructional Materials
- BP 6161.11 - Supplementary Instructional Materials
- BP 6163.1 - Library Media Centers
- BP 6164.2 - Guidance/Counseling Services
- BP/AR 6164.5 - Student Success Teams
- BB 9005 - Governance Standards
- BB 9130 - Board Committees
- BB 9323 - Meeting Conduct

Derby Pattengill has over 17 years of PTA volunteer service. He served as Vice President for Health and Community Concerns for the California State PTA and as President of the 9th District PTA, covering 70,000 members in San Diego and Imperial counties. Pattengill authored numerous position statements and resolutions, shaping policy and driving positive change. He remains an advocate for students, families, and education. He is a graduate of the University of San Diego with bachelor's degrees in computer science and marine studies.

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Bullying and cyberbullying

by Angela Asch

IN THIS BRIEF:

▸ Definitions of bullying and cyberbullying

▸ Statistics about bullying and cyberbullying

▸ Impacts of bullying and cyberbullying

▸ Signs of being bullied or bullying

▸ How local educational agencies can help students and families

▸ LEA examples of bullying prevention communication

▸ Sample questions for board members

▸ Relevant guidance and resources

Introduction

All students need safe and supportive environments to learn, grow, and thrive. Local educational agencies (LEAs) can foster safe and supportive school environments by continuously working to improve school climate for all students and staff. Governance teams can support their LEAs by reviewing policies and regulations, analyzing data on bullying in their districts and county offices of education (COEs), and advocating for ways to improve student and staff well-being and school climate.

A positive, safe, and inclusive school climate helps prevent bullying and harassment, reduce absenteeism, and improve academic achievement.[1] A safe and supportive school environment minimizes distractions and disruptions to teaching and learning, communicates expectations for student behavior clearly, applies consequences for infractions fairly and consistently, and is a place where students feel engaged, included, and not discriminated against.[2]

Since the 2018 passage of Assembly Bill 2291, all LEAs are required to adopt procedures for preventing acts of bullying and cyberbullying.[3] This brief links to various resources to assist LEAs in the work of building safe and inclusive schools so all students can learn and thrive.

Definition of bullying

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Stop Bullying website defines bullying as "unwanted, aggressive behavior that involves a real or perceived power imbalance.[4] The behavior is repeated, or has the potential to be repeated, over time." A power imbalance can include using physical strength, sharing embarrassing information, or using status to control or harm.

A one-time argument or disagreement where someone uses name calling or foul language does not constitute bullying. However, if the argument is not resolved and both parties have not moved on, then lingering ill will may result in continued verbal, social (relational), and/or physical abuse. All school staff, as well as parents and families, are responsible for teaching and modeling respectful behavior and building safe and supportive learning environments and should monitor all potential causes of bullying.
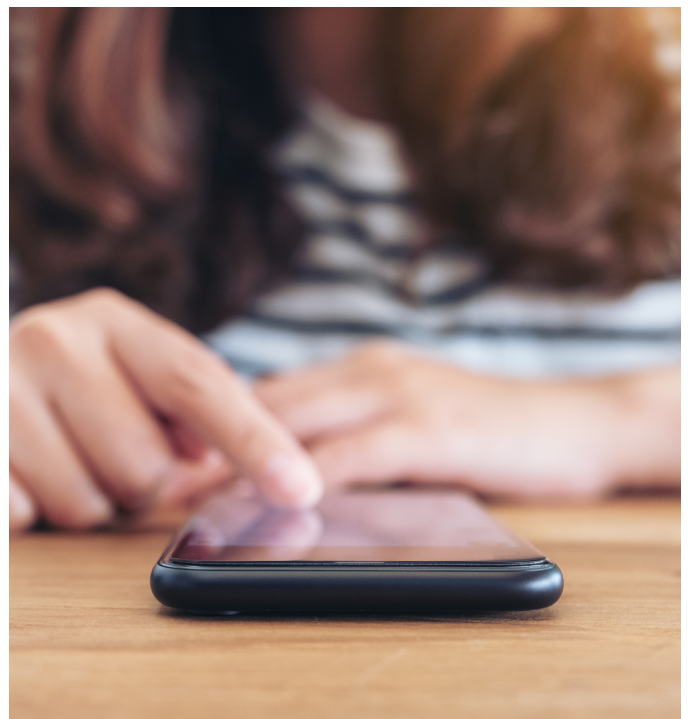
Bullying can take many forms

Bullying behavior can be verbal, social (relational), and/or physical, as outlined below.[5]

Verbal bullying
» Threatening harm » Making inappropriate sexual comments » Taunting » Teasing » Name calling

Social (relational) bullying
» Purposely hurting someone's relationship or reputation » Embarrassing others publicly » Deliberately excluding or isolating someone » Spreading rumors

Physical bullying
Causing physical harm to an individual by: » Hitting » Kicking » Pinching » Spitting » Pushing » Tripping » Choking » Destroying or damaging an individual's property by taking or breaking it

Students can also experience cyberbullying
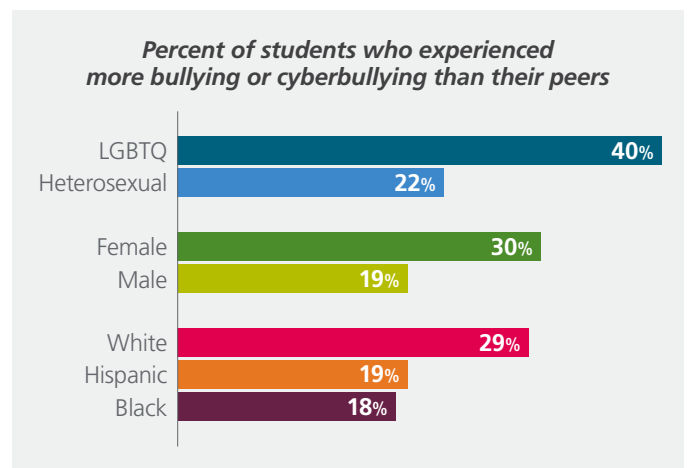
Cyberbullying, as defined by Stop Bullying:

▸ Occurs on electronic devices such as computers, tablets, and cell phones.

▸ Most commonly happens through text messaging, social media apps via direct message or public posts, gaming forums, chat rooms, message boards, and email.

▸ Can involve public shaming or humiliation by allowing others to view, participate in, or share disparaging or harmful content about an individual or group, which can include name calling and using slurs.

▸ Harmful content can be shared, sent, or posted publicly and can include personal or private information to cause humiliation or embarrassment, false or negative information to discredit or disparage, or threats of physical harm.

▸ Can ruin reputations of both the victim and those engaging in cyberbullying.

▸ Can be unlawful or criminal.[6]

Cyberbullying is distinct from in-person bullying because it can remain online indefinitely and can be harder to recognize. Like in-person bullying, cyberbullying can be persistent as well. Electronic devices allow constant communication, making cyberbullying instant and hard to ignore. Simultaneously, electronic communication is often permanent and public, which can harm an individual's reputation and impact their employment or educational opportunities. In addition, teachers, parents, and caregivers may not see cyberbullying, making it hard for them to notice what is happening.
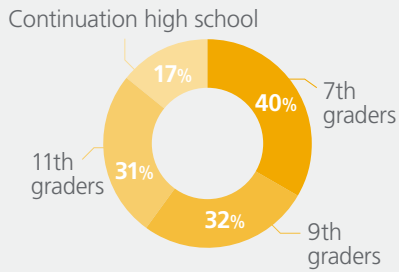
Statistics about bullying and cyberbullying

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), in 2021, one in five teenagers experienced bullying at school and one in six experienced cyberbullying.[7] In addition, some students experienced higher rates of bullying than others.[8]

Percent of students who experienced more bullying or cyberbullying than their peers

LGBTQ 40%
Heterosexual 22%
Female 30%
Male 19%
White 29%
Hispanic 19%
Black 18%

California Healthy Kids Survey data from 2019–21 indicates that 13 percent of elementary students in California reported experiencing cyberbullying, while 43 percent reported experiencing verbal harassment/bullying in school.[9] The latest survey data collected on cyberbullying and bullying for middle and high school students in California shows that:[10]

Students who reported experiencing cyberbullying

Continuation high school 14%
7th graders 27%
9th graders 24%
11th graders 22%
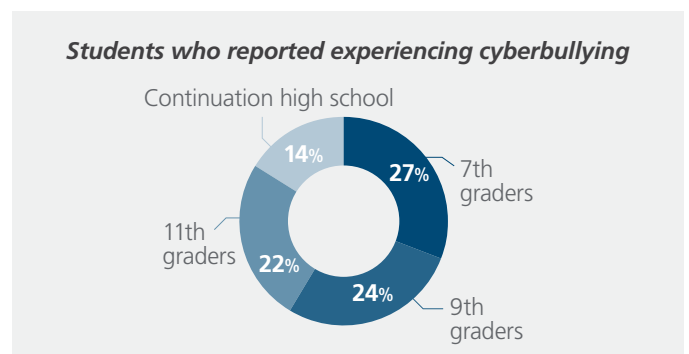
Students who reported experiencing more verbal harrassment and bullying in-person at school

Continuation high school 17%

11th graders 31%

7th graders 40%

9th graders 32%

Impacts of bullying and cyberbullying

The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention's 2022 literature review on bullying and cyberbullying reports that bullying can cause negative academic outcomes such as truancy, an increased likelihood of dropping out of school, and a lower grade point average.[11] Further, a longitudinal study by Swansea University on youth under the age of 25 and cyberbullying found that youth who were victims of cyberbullying were more than twice as likely to self-harm and engage in suicidal behaviors as their peers.[12] In addition, this study found that the victims were less likely to report cyberbullying or to seek help than if the bullying occurs in person.

Bullying impacts victims and perpetrators

Bullying can cause lasting emotional, psychological, and educational harm to both victims and perpetrators.

Some of the consequences for students who are bullied manifest in behaviors that educators and families can observe. The CDC notes that there are a range of behaviors that indicate that an individual is being bullied, including:

‣ Withdrawing from friends and family;
‣ Not wanting to attend school;
‣ Declining grades;
‣ Complaints about feeling sad, nervous, anxious, or angry;
‣ Trouble sleeping; and/or
‣ No longer showing interest in their favorite activities.[13]

An individual may not exhibit all the aforementioned behaviors, and the impacts of bullying may manifest in ways not listed here.

Bullying can be difficult to detect. Open and repeated communication about the importance of identifying and mitigating bullying with all students is important and necessary to improve school climate and safety.

Perpetrators also experience the consequences of their behavior. Individuals who bully are more likely to abuse drugs and alcohol in

the future, suffer academically in school, and may be more prone to commit subsequent violence or experience more acts of violence. According to the CDC, "Youth who bully others and are bullied themselves suffer the most serious consequences and are at greater risk for mental health and behavioral problems." The school's approach to working with students who bully can be important to preventing future issues for the students themselves and their peers.

LEAs can take steps to assist students and families

LEAs can engage in conversations with students and their school communities about identifying and reporting bullying and cyberbullying and provide training on digital citizenship and bystander intervention. Mental health professionals working in schools can ask students about cyberbullying and self-harm and provide suicide prevention resources. COEs can help create safe school environments by collaborating with districts on staff professional learning opportunities, providing technical assistance, and sharing resources.

Additionally, connection and belonging foster positive school climate and reduces bullying behaviors. Linking students with mentors and caring adults increases connection and a sense of belonging, thereby reducing disengagement and behavior issues.

Successful bullying prevention programs incorporate several key components through a range of short- and long-term strategies:

‣ Using diverse, communitywide resources;
‣ Implementing clear schoolwide expectations;
‣ Providing training for all staff;
‣ Using Multi-Tiered Systems of Supports;[14]
‣ Addressing multiple components of bullying behavior and the environments that foster it;
‣ Including student voice in the creation and implementation of bullying prevention programs;
‣ Including mentorship for students;
‣ Strengthening peer-to-peer relationships; and
‣ Teaching inter- and intrapersonal skills.[15]

Bullying prevention communication examples from LEAs

Because of the importance of providing a safe and inclusive school climate, many LEAs have invested significantly in bullying prevention. LEAs such as Long Beach Unified School District,[16] Elk Grove USD,[17] and Garden Grove USD[18] provide comprehensive information on their websites related to bullying prevention strategies and supports.

Including bullying prevention information in languages other than English, like Santa Clara County Office of Education, and making information accessible on various communication platforms will help ensure that all students and families receive and understand the impact of bullying and how to prevent it.[19]

Governance teams can lead by engaging their communities in creating a shared vision and responsibility for school safety and belonging to build a positive learning environment for all students and staff. Governance teams can assess their local resources and recruit community partners to aid their school safety and bullying prevention work. Building robust partnerships and meaningful community collaborations can enhance and extend a wider variety of resources and build stronger networks of support.

> **LEAs highlighted on the previous page provide examples of community communication on bullying and cyberbullying that educate and assist students and families.**
>
> They provide:
>
> ▸ Definitions of bullying and cyberbullying
> ▸ Digital citizenship education
> ▸ Instructions on how to report bullying
> ▸ Anonymous reporting (see Garden Grove USD for use of the STOP IT app)
> ▸ Resources for students and families
> ▸ Educational videos
> ▸ A list of policies that support bullying prevention

Questions for board members to consider

1) Do our board policies and administrative regulations addressing bullying comply with California laws?[20] How do our board policies and administrative regulations promote, assist, and create safe and supportive school environments?

2) What local data do we have about school climate? Are we tracking issues like bullying and cyberbullying?

3) What does the assessment of existing conditions in our LEA tell us about the needs of our students and opportunities for effective bullying prevention strategies?

4) Does our LEA have a professional learning plan to assist school staff in implementing the board policies and administrative regulations related to bullying?

5) What indicators can be used to monitor and assess the effectiveness of our LEA's safety-related policies and bullying prevention strategies? What additional resources are needed?

6) What opportunities are there to incorporate student, parent/guardian, and community input into our LEA's safety policies, curricula, and strategies?

Bullying and cyberbullying resources

The following includes bullying and cyberbullying prevention tools and school safety strategies:

Safe and supportive school environments

CSBA offers governance teams resources to enhance school safety, including guidance on a range of safety issues, sample board policies and administrative regulations, tips on developing comprehensive school safety plans and best practices for communicating during a crisis, along with associated magazine articles, policy briefs, and blogs. bit.ly/3pBStNd

Belonging: How Social Connection Can Heal, Empower, and Educate Kids by Dustin Bindreiff provides research-based strategies for strengthening relationships, building inclusive classrooms, developing trust, and fostering a sense of psychological safety. bit.ly/3smEGeW

SchoolSafety.gov provides schools and districts with actionable recommendations to create a safe and inclusive learning environment where students can thrive and grow. Use these resources to help implement anti-bullying initiatives at your schools, download the SchoolSafety.gov infographic for an overview of bullying, and learn about strategies to identify, prevent, and address bullying. bit.ly/3P4rvYW

Bullying prevention

This California State PTA webpage provides resources on bullying and cyberbullying to increase awareness and prevention and decrease bullying behavior. bit.ly/3snUj5W

The California Department of Education provides bullying prevention training materials, publications, and resources for educators, parents, community-based organizations, and community members for recognizing bullying behavior and approaches for determining how to respond. bit.ly/45EHh2d

StopBullying.gov provides information from various government agencies on what bullying and cyberbullying are, who is at risk, and how to prevent and respond to bullying. bit.ly/45kN0dL

The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry provides families and clinicians free resources regarding bullying, such as videos, research, training to prevention bullying, and book recommendations. bit.ly/44qGOzv

Relevant CSBA sample policies, administrative regulations, and legal guidance

CSBA GAMUT Policy and Policy *Plus* subscribers have access to the most up-to-date CSBA sample policy language. The following are sample board policies (BP) and administrative regulations (AR) that have been developed in compliance with California laws and address the issues of bullying, harassment, and discrimination:

▸ BP 0410 – Nondiscrimination in District Programs and Activities

▸ BP/AR 0450 – Comprehensive Safety Plan

▸ BP/AR 4119.11, 4219.11, & 4319.11 – Sexual Harassment

▸ BP/E 4119.12, 4219.12, & 4319.12 – Title IX Sexual Harassment Complaint Procedures

▸ BP/AR 5131.2 – Bullying

▸ BP 5131.8 – Mobile Communication Devices

▸ BP 5137 – Positive School Climate

▸ BP/AR 5145.2 – Freedom of Speech/Expression

▸ BP/AR 5145.3 – Nondiscrimination/Harassment

▸ BP 5145.9 – Hate-Motivated Behavior

▸ BP/AR 6145.5 – Student Organizations and Equal Access

▸ BP 6159.4 – Behavioral Interventions for Special Education Students

CSBA also provides legal guidance on issues of bullying, harassment, and discrimination. The following are a sample of legal guidance relevant to specific student groups:

▸ Legal Guidance on Rights of Transgender and Gender Nonconforming Students in Schools

▸ Legal Guidance Providing All Children Equal Access to Education, Regardless of Immigration Status

Angela Asch, M.A., is a principal research manager for the California School Boards Association.

Endnotes

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Impacts of Safety Threats: Reporting and Mitigating the Effects on the School Community

by Erika Felix, Ph.D.

IN THIS BRIEF:

▸ Statistics and impacts of safety threats

▸ Actions boards can take to improve school climate

▸ Sample questions for board members

▸ Relevant guidance and resources

▸ Relevant board policies and administrative regulations

Definitions:

▸ **School violence:** A continuum of behaviors beyond an active assailant planning a mass attack on a school can be considered school violence. More common forms of school violence include bullying, peer victimization, physical aggression, and general threats.

▸ **Trauma-informed:** The National Child Traumatic Stress Network states, "A trauma-informed school system (K-12) is one in which all teachers, school administrators, staff, students, families, and community members recognize and respond to the behavioral, emotional, relational, and academic impact of traumatic stress on those within the school system."

▸ **Developmentally appropriate:** This refers to taking into consideration the age and developmental level of the child(ren) being affected by a program, service, or practice.

Schools are safe places

Schools are one of the safest places for children to be,[1] and, over the last few decades, progress has been made on improving many indicators of school safety, such as declines in theft, violent victimization, bullying, and sexual harassment.[2] The good news is that schools are doing things that work and should continue these efforts. However, over the past decade, there have also been increases in cyberbullying, verbal abuse, and disrespect of school staff, as well as the most extreme form of school violence — school shootings.[3]

This brief addresses the impact of threats on students and staff and describes promising practices for managing threats and improving school climate, including a discussion of behavioral threat assessments.

Preparation is key

Active assailant threats are top of mind for educators, parents, and students given numerous high profile school attacks in recent years. Most school threats, however, are related to more common forms of school violence, such as bullying, peer victimization, physical fights, and verbal harassment, which do not rise to an active assailant threat.[4] Out of 6,006 tips to one statewide school safety tipline over

43 months, for example, only 228 (4 percent) were about a mass attack threat. Instead, most reports to the tipline involved bullying or harassment, suicides other students were planning, and self-harm.[5]

Consequently, schools need to be trained and prepared to handle the full range of school safety concerns, not only active assailant threats, and understand their potential impact on mental health, academic achievement, and school climate. All members of the school community need to work together to create a school climate where threats and safety concerns are reported and handled promptly and fairly in a developmentally appropriate and trauma-informed manner that is helpful to all parties in resolving the problem. Creating a comprehensive system for reporting and handling threats is one key step to the prevention of school violence.

Safety concerns can impact a range of student outcomes

Students' perception of safety at their school is associated with their mental health and academic achievement, and fighting, threats, and bullying diminish their sense of safety.[6] This section reviews the most recent research on the impact of school violence on students' academics, mental health, and well-being. The most recent research from the California Healthy Kids Survey on students' perceived safety at school reports that 61 percent of seventh grade students felt very safe or safe, while 55 percent of ninth graders, 54 percent of 11th graders, and 56 percent of continuation high school students reported feeling very safe or safe.[7]

Academic impacts

Research is unable to fully disentangle the impact of threats on academic achievement from the other indicators of school violence linked to diminished academic performance because threats co-occur with bullying, physical aggression, and peer harassment. To date, it is challenging to find studies that exclusively examine threats, let alone the small subset of threats that are about a mass attack. Therefore, this brief looks at the broader research on school violence and academics.

In a comprehensive review and meta-analysis of over 114 longitudinal studies on school violence, a team of researchers found that school violence was significantly associated with more unexcused absences, being less likely to graduate, and lower grade point averages.[8] The impact on academic performance is likely because school safety concerns can increase depression, and the symptoms associated with depression can diminish school performance.[9] Depression and anxiety can impair a student's ability to pay attention and focus in class, complete school assignments, and attend classes, all of which can impact academic performance.[10]

On the more extreme end of school safety concerns, a Stanford University policy brief about the impact of school shootings found that school shootings were associated with increased student absences post-shooting, declining student enrollment, declines in average test scores, more students needing to repeat a grade, and affected students' likelihood of graduating high school, attending college, and graduating college.[11]

Mental health and well-being impacts

Threats and acts of school violence of all types affect the mental health of both the perpetrators and the victims.[12] Perpetration is significantly related to depression and delinquent behavior, whereas victimization is related to depression and other mental health problems.[13]

Schools are increasingly likely to experience lockdowns, either due to real or hoax threats to the school community. According to the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP), lockdowns can impact the stress levels of all involved and exacerbate existing anxiety, depression, or traumatic stress symptoms in staff and students.[14]

Finally, there is a stark effect of school shootings on the well-being of the entire student body, as well as students from surrounding schools in the community.[15] Research has demonstrated that school shootings can have a traumatic ripple effect regionally beyond the school borders where the incident occurred. A study examining the impact of 44 U.S. school shootings found a 21 percent increase in prescriptions for anti-depressant medication for youth under the age of 20 in communities within five miles of a school shooting, compared to communities 10-15 miles from a school shooting.[16] In the years following the 1999 Columbine shooting, for example, there was a decrease in life expectancy among Jefferson County, Colorado, residents who were high-school aged at the time of the attack (particularly for males).[17] The decreased life expectancy was due to deaths by suicide and accidents among youth, not because of illness. Therefore, even schools not directly targeted need to plan for supporting their students' mental health in the aftermath of a mass attack at any school in their community.

Key steps to reduce stress during lockdowns and drills

Because lockdowns and safety drills can be stressful for students and staff, NASP offers several recommendations to mitigate the harm of planned lockdowns, and these strategies can also help after lockdowns due to hoax threats. For planned lockdown drills, NASP highly recommends a multidisciplinary planning team always announce drills to the entire school community, and ensures a school administrator is present during the drill, among other recommendations.

During a lockdown, NASP recommends clearly communicating whether there is an imminent risk, having all staff model a controlled response to mitigate student distress, communicating clearly with families via a pre-established communication system and through social media, and having a designated member of the crisis team monitoring social media to address any misinformation.

After a lockdown, share an update on social media and work with a public information officer to communicate with parents and other relevant parties, recognize and support trauma reactions among all members of the school community, conduct an evaluation of the lockdown, and incorporate lessons learned into future efforts.

School climate plays a key role in preventing school violence

The U.S. Secret Service National Threat Assessment Center (NTAC) studied 41 U.S. school attacks that occurred at K-12 schools from 2008 to 2017 and found that 77 percent of attackers threatened their targets or otherwise shared information about their plan to attack, thus potentially providing an opportunity to prevent the attack.[18] This report also supports what its previous investigations had concluded — that there is no profile of a student who would attack their school, nor is there a profile of the type of school that is at increased risk of having an attack. Their analysis revealed that attackers varied across age, gender, race, grade level, school performance, and social characteristics. The schools targeted represent a range of school sizes, geographic locations and types, and student-teacher ratios. Indeed, in the 2020–21 academic year, more elementary schools had shootings (fatal and non-fatal) than high schools, and both public and private schools experienced shootings.[19]

Commonalities found across attacks:

- Most attackers told someone about their plan;

- Attackers experienced a multitude of stressors of different varieties, with a common stressor being peer problems; and

- Grievances against the attackers were increasing, including from peers, school staff, and others.

Unfortunately, NTAC found that only 17 percent of schools that experienced an attack had a system in place for the school community to report threats before the attack. Based on this, schools need to develop a system for addressing and reporting school safety concerns. NTAC, along with NASP and leaders in school safety, also recommend a comprehensive, multidisciplinary, developmentally appropriate, trauma-informed threat assessment and management team to distinguish serious threats from impulsive, hyperbolic statements often made out of anger.[20]

Behavioral threat assessment is addressed further in another brief, which offers ways schools can increase the likelihood of students reporting threats.

School staff can only respond to a threat if they know about it. Thus, creating an environment where students and staff feel comfortable coming forward, believe that the school can help, and have the ability to easily report via a variety of methods (e.g., text, call, online, etc.), with the option of anonymity, helps.[21] University of Virginia researchers Caroline Crichlow-Ball and Dewey Cornell reviewed several barriers to reporting threats, including:

- Perception of reporting as "snitching";

- Fear of retaliation and peer disapproval of reporting;

- Fear of not being believed;

- Not being able to report anonymously or have confidentiality; and

- Fear of getting in trouble.[22]

When looking at willingness to report threats, researchers found that a minority of students who were not willing to report tended to be students who were suspended more often, had less engagement in school, did not perceive teachers as supportive, and did not believe school discipline structures were being fairly applied.[23] This finding reinforces the importance of a proactive approach to building a positive school climate.

School climate is key to preventing school violence. Building a positive school climate includes engaging and empowering students in safety preparedness.[24] Thus, it is important to prepare and train students on safety practices such as comprehensive reporting systems to prevent peer and school violence.[25] Integrating student preparedness into all programs offered at schools such as curriculum, activities, assemblies, workshops, and listening sessions strengthens students' capacity and resilience.[26]

Staff well-being is also linked to a positive school climate

A positive school climate supports an environment where students and staff feel they can report threats and the report will be handled in a meaningful and helpful way.[27] The well-being of teachers and school personnel is foundational in establishing a positive school climate. This is critical to address, as students in schools where teachers perceived a supportive and structured climate were more likely to report homicidal threats.[28] Unfortunately, the American Psychological Association Task Force on Violence Against Educators and School Personnel found in its large-scale survey of educators that 33 percent of teachers and 37 percent of administrators reported verbal aggression or threats of violence from students, and 29 percent of teachers and 42 percent of administrators experienced this from parents.[29] Likewise, a significant minority experienced physical violence from students (14-22 percent depending on school role). Safety concerns contributed to high stress rates, and nearly half of the teachers surveyed, and approximately one-third of other school personnel (administrators, staff, school psychologists), reported a desire or plan to quit or transfer jobs.[30]

Actions boards can take to improve school climate

Governance teams can take several key actions to increase the likelihood that students will report threats and reduce the impacts of threats on students and staff. The following are some recommendations for supporting conditions that can improve reporting when threats are made:

Action 1: Consider investing in an anonymous threat reporting system.

Over half of public middle and high schools in the U.S. have implemented tiplines,[31] many of which allow anonymous reporting, which is associated with an increase in students' likelihood to report.[32] Some examples are the Safe2Tell tipline in Colorado, and the Say Something Anonymous Reporting System created by the Sandy Hook Promise Foundation.[33] However, having technology available is not enough; there need to be policies and supportive practices in place to handle the variety of tips that come in, which can consist of reports of bullying, suicide, self-harm, and active assailant threats.[34] Students will need to be trained on how to report concerns and what they can expect if they use the system.[35]

Action 2: Ensure discipline practices are consistent, fairly applied, reward positive behavior, and avoid zero tolerance approaches.

Efforts to ensure that all students are treated fairly in school discipline matters can improve student willingness to report threats.[36] Regularly examining school disciplinary data by race/ethnicity, gender identity, special education status, and other demographics can help school administrators identify and address any disparities found. Avoid "zero tolerance" approaches to discipline, which decades of research have shown to have a chilling effect on students' willingness to report bullying, harassment, and threats.[37]

Action 3: Consider implementing a multi-disciplinary comprehensive threat assessment team.

Best practices in implementing a threat assessment team can be found on the NASP website. Having a variety of perspectives at the table, including those grounded in mental health and child development, can help reduce the bias inherent when individuals are making decisions alone. Siloed decision making can lead to disparities in discipline practices that have affected racial and ethnic minority populations and students with disabilities. Thus, having a multidisciplinary, well-trained team can improve school safety and reduce disparities in discipline.[38] To reduce the likelihood of an attack being carried out, threat assessment teams should address any stressors or grievances when a student makes a serious threat to harm the school community.

Students represent a large population of the school community; therefore, it is important to find ways to include student voice, engagement, and empowerment in the comprehensive threat assessment team. Student partnership can include:

▸ Participating in activities before, during, and after an emergency;

▸ Providing input on technology, safety policies, and emergency operations plans;

▸ Influencing peers, family, and community members to support and become involved in school safety; and

▸ Receiving training on emergency preparedness such as CPR, basic first aid, warning signs of suicide, bullying prevention, active shooters, opioids, and cybersafety best practices and trends.[39]

Action 4: Allocate funding to support student and educator mental health and trauma-informed practices.

Threats and violence take a mental health toll on students, teachers, staff, and administrators. As noted earlier, this affects student academic achievement and educator stress and job turnover. Efforts to ensure the recommended ratio of school psychologists and school counselors to students within every school would not only help provide support for distressed students but would also help teachers in their efforts to meet the emotional, behavioral, and developmental needs of their students. Funding to support staff wellness and mental health can help with job retention and satisfaction. Training in trauma-informed practices is a key step in promoting a positive school climate.

Action 5: Train the school community on identifying and responding to distressed students.

In addition to training in risk factors and warning signs of violence,[40] the school community needs to understand how to support students who are experiencing bullying or harassment or are contemplating suicide, as these are the most common reports to existing school tiplines.[41] Making sure there is no "wrong door" for a student seeking help for themselves or others is critical to school safety. Governance teams should inquire about the measures schools are taking to track concerns and reduce the likelihood that reports are lost in the systems schools have adopted.

Questions for governance teams to consider

Questions board members may ask to provide oversight and ensure accountability regarding school safety include:

1) What mechanisms does the LEA provide for students, educators, and parents to report threats to the school? How may this vary by grade level (e.g., elementary, middle, or high school)?

2) Can reports be made anonymously?

3) What training and coordination does the LEA have to address the variety of threats and concerns received in a timely and helpful manner?

4) Once a safety concern is expressed, whether it is a student experiencing bullying or the rarer active assailant threat, what policies and procedures does the LEA have in place to address the concern?

5) What steps are being taken to ensure that these procedures reduce the likelihood of concerns being lost in the reporting system (e.g., if a key individual is unavailable, are there additional staff who can track reports)?

6) What data does the LEA have about students' perceived sense of safety and other elements of school climate?

Relevant resources

National Association of School Psychologists Guidance on Threat Assessment at School

A list of 10 facts and tips on threat assessment at school, along with relevant resources. https://bit.ly/3TkVhJU

Comprehensive School Threat Assessment Guidelines

This site provides original research on the threat assessment model (originally the Virginia Student Threat Assessment Guidelines, now the Comprehensive School Threat Assessment Guidelines [VSTAG, now known as CSTAG]). VSTAG is the only threat assessment model that has been tested in controlled studies and fully meets federal criteria for an evidence-based practice. https://bit.ly/43eRPVT

National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments

The National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments website provides resources such as research, briefs, fact sheets, videos, training, and guides on safe and supportive school environments.https://bit.ly/43mlNqT

National Association of School Psychologists

Mitigating Psychological Effects of Lockdowns fact sheet. https://bit.ly/3IAb2YH

CSBA Business Affiliates for School Safety and Culture

A list of business affiliates that specialize in school safety resources. https://bit.ly/48TFtDM

Kaiser Permanente Thriving Schools Integrated Assessment

The Thriving School Integrated Assessment was developed for schools and districts to advance wellness and educational goals by incorporating health-related strategies for students and staff into school and district improvement efforts. This no-cost assessment, available to everyone on the Alliance for a Healthier Generation Action Center, provides actionable steps and credible resources to advance improvements — all rooted in an equitable approach to whole-child health. https://k-p.li/3TkX15M

Relevant CSBA board policies and administrative regulations

CSBA GAMUT Policy and Policy *Plus* subscribers have access to sample policies. The following are sample policies and administrative regulations relevant to discipline, suspension, bullying, and harassment.

▶ BP 0410 - Nondiscrimination in District Programs and Activities

▶ BP 1100 - Communication with the Public

▶ BP/AR 1250 - Visitors/Outsiders

▶ BP 1313 - Civility

▶ BP/AR 3515 - Campus Security

▶ BP 3515.7 - Firearms on School Grounds

▶ BP/AR 3516 - Emergencies and Disaster Preparedness Plan

▶ AR 3516.1 - Fire Drills and Fires

▶ AR 3516.2 - Bomb Threats

▶ BP/AR 4119.11 - Sexual Harassment

▶ BP 4219.11/ AR 4219.11 - Sexual Harassment

▶ BP 4319.11/ AR 4319.11 - Sexual Harassment

▶ BP/E 4119.12 - Title IX Sexual Harassment Complaint Procedures

▶ BP 4219.12/ E 4219.12 - Title IX Sexual Harassment Complaint Procedures

▶ BP 4319.12/ E 4319.12 - Title IX Sexual Harassment Complaint Procedures

▶ BP/AR 5144 - Discipline

▶ BP/AR 5144.1 - Suspension and Expulsion/Due Process

▶ BP/AR 5131.7 - Weapons and Dangerous Instruments

▶ BP 5131.8 - Mobile Communication Devices

▶ BP 5137 - Positive School Climate

▶ BP 5138 - Conflict Resolution/Peer Mediation

▶ BP 5141.5 - Mental Health

▶ BP/AR 5141.52 - Suicide Prevention

▶ BP 5145.2 - Freedom of Speech/Expression

▶ BP/AR 5145.3 - Nondiscrimination/Harassment

▶ BP 5145.9 - Hate-Motivated Behavior

▶ BP/AR 6145.5 - Student Organizations and Equal Access

▶ BP/AR 6159.1 - Procedural Safeguards and Complaints for Special Education

- BP 6159.4 - Behavioral Interventions for Special Education Students
- BP 6164.2 - Guidance/Counseling Services
- BP/AR 6164.4 - Identification and Evaluation of Individuals for Special Education
- BP/AR 6164.5 - Student Success Teams
- BP 6164.6 - Identification and Education Under Section 504

Dr. Erika Felix is professor of Clinical Psychology at UC Santa Barbara and a licensed psychologist specializing in trauma treatment for children and families. Dr. Felix's research focuses on the risk and protective factors affecting children's long-term mental health following natural disasters, mass shootings, and terrorism. Multiple national institutes, including the National Science Foundation, have funded her research. Dr. Felix trains counseling, clinical, and school psychologists on preventive interventions and trauma treatment for children and has developed a disaster mental health class at UCSB.

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Behavioral Threat Assessment

by John Czajkowski, MM

IN THIS BRIEF:

- ▸ Definitions of behavioral threat assessment and other key terms
- ▸ Components of implementing behavioral threat assessment protocols
- ▸ Sample questions for board members
- ▸ Relevant guidance and resources
- ▸ Relevant board policies and administrative regulations

Key terms and definitions:

- ▸ **Behavioral Threat Assessment and Management (BTAM):** The process of identifying a person of concern, assessing their potential to carry out a homicidal threat, and identifying interviewing strategies to manage that risk. (Note: The term is sometimes confused with other terms indicating a suicide screening/assessment or physical security infrastructure review.)

- ▸ **Behavioral Threat Assessment Protocol (BTAP):** The specific protocol an organization uses to conduct Behavioral Threat Assessment and Management. The term is often interchanged with BTAM.

- ▸ **Target Hardening:** Measures taken to reinforce or strengthen the physical environment of a location or facility to deter a criminal or terrorist act.

Balanced school safety plans emphasize violence prevention

The devastating impacts of a school shooting on students, staff, and the community are deep and long lasting. School shootings often initiate a pattern of blame and reactive opinions that may involve target hardening, placing armed officers at schools, and many other strategies focused primarily on the response to a violent emergency — the immediate detection and/or prevention through physical security measures. Although every Comprehensive School Safety Plan (CSSP) should include essential physical and response elements, the most balanced plan will place an emphasis on violence prevention.

Governance teams support the safety of their district or county office of education through their guidance, engagement with the review of CSSPs, adoption of local policies, and their role in budget oversight. Additionally, new legislation, Senate Bill 553, requires all employers with more than 10 employees to establish, implement, and maintain a Workplace Violence Prevention Plan (WVPP). Best practices for local educational agencies (LEAs) include continuing to coordinate and collaborate across departments, staff, and with partners to ensure that both the CSSP and the new WVPP are written, edited, and updated in tandem. More information on SB 553 is available in the resources section of this document.

This brief focuses on behavioral threat assessment to provide board members with background information that can facilitate informed discussions and decision making.

Behavioral threat assessment is key to violence prevention

Unlike many other aspects of public education, there are no clear mandates for behavioral threat assessment as a required violence prevention tool at the time of this writing. Since the initial findings of the 2000 United States Secret Service Safe Schools Initiative, published in the wake of the paradigm-shifting Columbine High School attack, there has been a growing body of research and ensuing federal guidance that strongly recommends behavioral threat assessment as the most effective tool to prevent targeted violence within the scope of CSSPs.

What is behavioral threat assessment?

United States Secret Service (USSS) guidance for educators establishes the goal of threat assessment is "to identify students of concern, assess their risk for engaging in violence or other harmful activities, and identify intervention strategies to manage that risk."[1]

USSS recommends that a comprehensive threat assessment process include:

- Developing multidisciplinary threat assessment teams
- Forming central reporting mechanisms
- Identifying behaviors of concern
- Defining the threshold for law enforcement intervention
- Identifying risk management strategies
- Promoting safe school climates
- Providing training to stakeholders

It is important to note that, according to the USSS, "there is no profile for a student attacker nor is there a profile for the type of school that has been targeted."[2] As such, behavioral threat assessments should gather evidence of concerning behaviors, situational factors, and circumstances to assess the risks of harm or violence.[3]

Interventions, not just expulsions, to promote health and safety

In the most extreme cases, removal may be necessary; however, it should never be seen as a single, common solution. The Parkland High School shooting and other cases have illustrated that removal, or expulsion alone, can fail to mitigate danger. Nevertheless, community and internal fears can place tremendous pressure on leaders to opt for these perfunctory options rather than investing in a more thorough and coordinated, long-term threat management and student support strategy.

Furthermore, the USSS guidance strongly reminds that there are no useful profiles of an active shooter. The assessment process must be as objective as possible; best practices include using an equity lens, awareness of bias, and implementing cultural awareness and responsiveness. The main purpose of the assessment is to identify the most suitable interventions, monitoring, and case management goals — with the ultimate objectives of helping an unwell student become healthy and providing safety for all.

It is also important to reiterate that behavioral threat assessment is **not** a substitute for processes that address nonviolent behavior, nor is it a disciplinary process to remove "difficult" students.[4]

Implementing behavioral threat assessment protocols

Ample federal guidance provides well-researched universal investigative themes and comprehensive detailed considerations for behavioral threat assessment protocols; however, LEAs will most often be required to work with county authorities and/or subject matter experts to arrive at their own specific protocol for documentation, data collection, data sharing, analysis, student supports, and other administrative details required in a comprehensive system at the local level. Although resources vary widely between LEAs, thorough documentation is critical at all phases of the threat assessment process, and particularly in regions where there may not yet be a standardized countywide or regional joint reporting protocol. The San Diego County School Threat Protocol serves as an example of a comprehensive joint product developed across multiple agencies.

Law enforcement agencies are essential partners in school safety efforts

California's Senate Bill 906 requires school officials to notify law enforcement of homicidal threats. Moreover, if a school has a robust threat assessment process, a series of parallel and coordinated investigative processes will often ensue — driven by the initial student behaviors and communications or concerns from reporting peers, staff, parents, or community. School Resource Officers (SROs) and local law enforcement have a wide spectrum of investigative resources, skills, and authorities that complement the education-based threat assessment process.

LEAs, with support of general counsel, should have a clear understanding of laws that govern information sharing in order to balance privacy requirements and disclosure or sharing permitted for safety. Policies should also be in place to ensure any law enforcement officers who work with students are trained to work with youth in ways that are appropriate to their development and are culturally proficient. Basic disciplinary concerns should be left to the LEA's administrators. CSBA offers sample policies about SROs and school police, which highlight training and recommend that LEAs track and review officer contact with students, disaggregated by race. LEAs ultimately have a moral imperative to promote safe learning environments.

Multidisciplinary case management

Threat assessment is ultimately a multidisciplinary process that can simultaneously engage parallel networks in more complex cases, including, for example, LEA safety and security, student support services, special education, risk management, and legal departments, along with local (and occasionally federal) law enforcement, county and private mental health, and other community resources. The most complex cases, particularly those with higher threat potential,

often require ongoing coordination and cooperation to effectively provide the appropriate supports and safeguards and surmount barriers to success. It is recommended that smaller LEAs form working relationships with LEAs with strong processes that are willing to share best practices.

Civil liability

Beyond the moral imperative for LEAs to endeavor to maintain a safe school environment, the potential for civil liability also encourages concrete violence prevention efforts. In civil case law, there is an increasing expectation for LEAs to prevent violence that could be determined as foreseeable and, thus, preventable. This evolving case law is gradually raising the standard for what constitutes due diligence. Moreover, other related aspects are in flux, such as foreseeability and education responsibilities as well as the higher thresholds for arrest for terroristic threats and involuntary 5150 holds (California Code, Welfare and Institutions Code - WIC § 5150, allows a person with a mental challenge to be involuntarily detained for a 72-hour psychiatric hospitalization).

Partnering with experts

Retaining the expertise of a certified threat manager can be critical to gaining insight into difficult cases. The Association of Threat Assessment Professionals has developed a rigorous and specialized certification process. Sometimes, behaviors that may not yet rise to the level of a threat could still indicate a high threat potential. There have been cases in which the student of concern never actually broke a law or violated a district policy. However, the behaviors and/or communications elicited such deep concerns that full attention and preventative actions were necessary. An external threat assessment professional augmenting an extended network of supports can be critical to effectively assess the situation and advise management of ways to promote safety and achieve the most positive, healthy outcome for the student of concern — the ultimate goal of behavioral threat assessment.

Questions for governance teams to consider

Threat assessment process

1) **Staffing and internal coordination**
   - Have staff been identified for LEA leadership and internal coordination, site threat assessment teams, site case managers, and district case navigator(s)?
   - Has the LEA established thresholds for internal notifications, law enforcement notifications, and legal counsel involvement?

2) **Partnerships and external coordination**
   - To what extent has the LEA established relationships with the county's extended network of support? Note that these potential partners could include, but are not limited to, the following organizations or people: county offices of education, county health and human services, county mental health, Psychiatric Emergency Response Team (PERT), district attorney, federal and local law enforcement fusion/coordination center, other LEAs, local community agencies, and threat management subject matter experts/consultants.

3) **Protocol**
   - Does the LEA's behavioral threat assessment protocol meet current industry best practices?
   - Does it contain the core USSS investigative themes?
   - To what extent is it integrated within the larger county network (see, e.g., San Diego County School Threat Protocol)?
   - Does it help ensure compliance?
   - Does it contain documentation to satisfy a range of student support and intervention needs, potential disciplinary processes, and criminal and civil law expectations?
   - Does it help meet current standards of care (e.g., due diligence, shifting civil liability thresholds, etc.)?

4) **Implementation**
   - Is the LEA providing an adequate professional development and training process?
   - Are there clear student and staff reporting mechanisms?
   - Does the LEA provide ongoing site guidance and operational support processes?

Relevant resources

California Legislative Information

Senate Bill 906 (2021–22) — School Safety: Homicide threats

SB 906 requires LEAs to annually notify parents and guardians of proper firearm storage and laws related to the safe storage of firearms. The entirety of text of the bill can be found here: https://csba.pub/4ciktJA.

SB 553 (2023–24) — Occupational safety: Workplace violence: Restraining orders and workplace violence prevention plan

SB 553 requires an employer to establish, implement, and maintain an effective workplace violence prevention plan, to provide training for employees on the plan, and to provide additional training when the plan is updated, or a new workplace violence hazard has been identified. The entirety of text of the bill can be found here: https://csba.pub/3U62cse.

United States Secret Service (USSS)

This guide provides basic instructions for schools on creating a targeted violence prevention plan, the focus of which is to decrease the risk of students engaging in harm to themselves or the school community. These recommendations serve as a starting point on a path to implementation that will need to be customized to the specific needs of your school, student body, and community. https://csba.pub/3IyWSaa

USSS Improving School Safety Through Bystander Reporting

This toolkit provides schools with actionable, practical, and cost-efficient steps toward preventing harm or acts of violence among our most important populations. The Cybersecurity Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) works with partners to defend against an evolving and unique set of threats, hazards, and security challenges facing schools, and it collaborates to build a more secure and resilient school infrastructure for the future. USSS has maintained a focus on preventing targeted school violence for over 20 years by providing research, training, and consultation on multi-disciplinary behavioral threat assessment programs and the prevention of targeted school violence. Together, CISA and USSS are working to ensure all children in our nation's schools are safe. https://csba.pub/3PnNCtj

National Association of School Psychologists

Evidence-based policies and practices for improving school safety and increasing access to mental health supports for children and youth. Efforts to improve school climate, safety, and learning are not separate endeavors and must be designed, funded, and implemented as a comprehensive school-wide approach. https://csba.pub/4ahuIfL

NASP tipsheet https://csba.pub/3VpGFLQ

Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools (REMS) Technical Assistance Center

An overview of school behavioral threat assessments to prevent and reduce targeted violence. https://csba.pub/3x52JkM

San Diego County District Attorney's Office

This link directs users to a protocol to reduce the risk of an incident of targeted violence in San Diego county schools through the formalization of a comprehensive protocol for San Diego school districts, law enforcement, and mental health professionals that helps identify individuals whose behavior causes concern and facilitates communication of those concerns to the involved parties. https://csba.pub/3PohTrP

Relevant CSBA board policies and administrative regulations

CSBA GAMUT Policy and Policy *Plus* subscribers have access to sample policies. The following are sample policies and administrative regulations relevant to behavioral threat assessment.

‣ BP/AR 3515.3 - District Police/Security Department

‣ BP 3515.31 - School Resource Officers

‣ BP 5112.5 - Open/Closed Campus

‣ BP/AR 5131.2 - Bullying

‣ BP/AR 5131.4 - Student Disturbances

‣ BP/AR 5131.7 - Weapons and Dangerous Instruments

‣ BP/AR 5136 - Gangs

‣ BP 5137 - Positive School Climate

‣ BP 5138 - Conflict Resolution/Peer Mediation

‣ BP 5141.5 - Mental Health

‣ BP/AR 5142 - Safety

‣ BP/AR 5144.1 - Suspension and Expulsion/Due Process

‣ AR 5144.2 - Suspension and Expulsion/Due Process (Students with Disabilities)

‣ BP 5145.11 - Questioning and Apprehension by Law Enforcement

‣ BP/AR 5145.12 - Search and Seizure

‣ BP 6120 - Response to Instruction and Intervention

‣ BP 6164.2 - Guidance/Counseling Services

‣ BP/AR 6164.5 - Student Success Teams

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Endnotes

1   United States Secret Service. Enhancing School Safety Using a Threat
     Assessment Model: An Operational Guide for Preventing Targeted
     School Violence. (2018). https://csba.pub/3vm1xsR

2   Protecting America's Schools: A U.S. Secret Service Analysis of
     Targeted School Violence. (2019). https://bit.ly/4a3W09c

3   See Endnote 2.

4   NASP School Safety and Crisis Response Committee. (2020).
     Behavior threat assessment and management: Best practice
     considerations for K-12 schools, Brief Overview. National Association
     of School Psychologists. https://csba.pub/48PcC3q

Infrastructure Improvements for School Safety

by John Czajkowski, MM

IN THIS BRIEF:

▸ Infrastructure improvements for safety

▸ Sample questions for board members

▸ Relevant guidance and resources

▸ Relevant board policies and administrative regulations

Balanced school safety plans emphasize violence prevention

Physical security is a component of the broader school safety system. A critical understanding of infrastructure can enable governance teams to be creative and collaborative with their local educational agency (LEA) resources. This brief describes the relationship between infrastructure and school safety, provides questions for board members to consider, and outlines relevant resources, including sample policies. The material included is not intended to provide a detailed manual for infrastructure planning. It is intended to provide an overview of key concepts and considerations so that governance teams are prepared to engage in informed discussions with LEA staff and other educational and community partners.

Infrastructure improvement

Infrastructure can play a role in the prevention, protection, mitigation, response, and recovery phases of emergency management. These five preparedness areas are all connected and directly address the greatest risk in an emergency event.

According to the Cybersecurity Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA), when thinking of developing or improving physical security, LEAs should consider:

▸ How might certain physical security measures already in place or under consideration negatively affect efforts to prevent threats from occurring? For instance, could highly visible and intrusive security measures such as indoor surveillance cameras or metal

Key terms and definitions:

▸ **Infrastructure:** Infrastructure encompasses all the tangible facilities and technologies on a school campus, from buildings and trees to stadiums and classroom technologies.

▸ **Facilities master plan:** A facilities master plan is the culmination of a process in which the board of education and LEA staff collect and analyze data regarding the current and future facilities needs of the LEA. The data collected is used to inform future LEA facilities planning.

▸ **Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED):** CPTED principles recommend improving security through "natural surveillance," established via clear sightlines rather than surveillance technology or security personnel; perimeter barriers constructed from landscaping instead of fencing; and clear signage to aid building evacuation and first-responder access instead of equipment- and personnel-reliant communication or surveillance systems.

▸ **Prevention:** Refers to the capabilities to avoid, deter, or stop an imminent crime, or a threatened or actual mass casualty incident.

▸ **Protection:** Refers to the capabilities necessary to secure schools against acts of violence and manmade or natural disasters.

▸ **Mitigation:** Refers to the capabilities necessary to eliminate or reduce the loss of life and property damage by lessening the impact of an event or emergency.

▸ **Response:** Refers to the capabilities to stabilize an emergency once it has already happened or is certain to happen; establish a safe and secure environment; save lives and property; and facilitate the transition to recovery.

detectors work to elevate student fears of victimization and degrade school climate?

▸ How might certain physical security measures already in place or under consideration hinder efforts to respond to incidents and recover from their negative consequences? For instance, could certain measures such as automatic locks on classroom doors hinder response from law enforcement personnel and emergency responders?[1]

Each LEA has different needs and resources; there is no one-size-fits-all approach to school safety. Some communities may focus more on the physical infrastructure aspects of campus safety and security than others.

Although infrastructure plays an important role in comprehensive school safety, new improvements and initiatives should be driven by an LEA's overall goals, vision, and standards — with an emphasis on how the tangible physical elements impact both the perception of safety and *actual* safety. This is an area where governance teams can offer useful guidance and support.

Unlike fire and structural (e.g., earthquake emergency procedures) design standards set in law or code, education physical security guidelines often lack the same level of clarity and mandates. Therefore, school leaders are routinely faced with multiple challenges and responsibilities when considering upgrading existing facilities in terms of scope, priorities, and return on investment.

Given that security standards are not regulated in education facilities (with few exceptions), LEAs have the latitude to form their own security guidelines for upgrading, retrofitting, and new construction. LEAs also generally have the latitude to form their own internal review process and cycles. It is recommended that LEAs develop layered review processes that inform their technical and education standards in consultation with a range of subject matter experts and practitioners.

Items that should be reviewed more frequently can be assessed by the School Safety Committee members with special training and structured self-assessments and documented in the Comprehensive School Safety Plans (described in greater detail within a separate companion brief. Items requiring more extensive facility upgrades, modification, retrofitting, and construction are more suitable for an LEA review process. The LEA review process should incorporate site inputs alongside standards.

Facilities master plan process

Some may find it surprising that few design and construction professionals have specific expertise in aspects of school physical security design beyond strict building code requirements. It is not uncommon for schools built or upgraded in recent decades to still have multiple features that may complicate efficient daily supervision, monitoring, and access.

For example, it is common to find school facilities of varying ages with glazing (glass) on or near doors — a well-documented vulnerability to vandalism, break-ins, and forced entry during an armed attack (refer to the Options-based Responses section of the Safe Schools Toolkit. Although this is only a single example, identifying and creating a priority scale for addressing existing deficiencies can be a complex process that is ideally incorporated into a longer-term facilities master planning process that leverages multiple funding sources.

School sites should provide input into the long-range planning process and should retain the latitude to propose shorter-term infrastructure enhancements.

Developing district technical and education standards

It is a best practice for medium to large LEAs to develop district technical and education standards (district-level requirements and guidelines for all layers of physical infrastructure), together with collaborative task forces of both staff and consultants to establish requirements for new construction, as well as provisions for retrofits and upgrades for all types of infrastructure. These standards may augment all current California Building Code requirements, as administered through the Division of the State Architect (DSA), but never contradict them.

Technical and education standards can help ensure appropriate inter-systems coordination to avoid patchwork, incompatible, and unserviceable systems. Regarding campus safety, the standards should also involve Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) considerations, which improve design efficiencies across areas such as access control, lighting, lines of sight, boundary control, paths of travel, and natural and electronic supervision appropriate for multiple student developmental levels.

Although smaller LEAs may not have a dedicated planning department to help develop such detailed documents, they can work with their county offices of education or form partnerships with neighboring or larger LEAs to help establish physical safety as a key area in their technical and education standards.

While governance teams are not solely responsible for the infrastructure design of schools in their LEA, boards of education do have influence on the policies, procedures, and projects that can be advanced at the school and district level to address concerns to improve safety. Understanding these key concepts of infrastructure and the need for upkeep of school facilities to enhance safety allows board members to make informed decisions.

Questions for governance teams to consider

1) **Staffing and internal coordination**

   ▸ To what extent is there a centralized LEA process to support each site's needs?

- If the LEA doesn't have a dedicated safety and security and/or planning position, how can processes be coordinated to support a range of safety and security infrastructure needs — from short- to long-term objectives and projects?

- Are there procurement and contract review processes in place to ensure compliance with existing LEA goals, purchasing requirements, and overall efficient use of resources?

2) **Partnerships and external coordination**

- Do LEA leaders in all fields related to infrastructure have relationships with partners, authorities, and subject matter experts who can help inform assessment, decision-making, and procurement processes? These may include awareness of independent contractors, consultants, and others without proper credentials, experience, etc.

3) **Standards-driven process**

- To what extent are the LEA's safety and security upgrades driven by a careful, long-term process informed by authoritative and comprehensive assessments, established Technical and Education Standards, and return on investment considerations?

4) **Implementation**

   Training:

- Are LEA leaders in fields related to safety and security infrastructure knowledgeable of DSA requirements?

- Do they have collective awareness of pertinent concepts of CPTED, federal resources from CISA and Department of Homeland Security, and FBI's community outreach organization Infragard?

- Are they familiar with common facility vulnerabilities during active shooter attacks?

- Does the LEA have at least one designated person trained or certified through the regional federal-local law enforcement fusion centers as an Infrastructure Liaison Officer, or similar? (Fusion centers are law enforcement coordination and intelligence sharing hubs for federal, state, local, and tribal partners.)

   Balanced Funding:

- Although LEA infrastructure upgrades may often be managed through separate funding sources than those for training, professional development, and student support initiatives, to what extent do infrastructure upgrades balance infrastructure safety, physiological safety, and behavioral safety?

Relevant resources

CSBA Business Affiliate Total School Solutions, Facilities Master Plans

Total School Solutions (TSS) professionals assist districts across the state in planning for their facilities needs through the development of high-quality comprehensive facilities master plans. Well-constructed and maintained facilities, designed to serve the planned educational programs and needs of the district students, are vital to the success of all students and their learning. Acknowledging that correlation, TSS offers a comprehensive slate of services in the areas of facilities planning, funding and construction. https://bit.ly/49UDNvc

School Security Assessment Tool (SSAT) Glossary

A glossary of school security assessment terms. https://bit.ly/49UDS1Y

K-12 SSAT Tool

SSAT is provided by CISA and is designed to help inform the school's safety and security planning process by taking stock of what security measures and associated supports are in place across the campus and where improvements can be made to improve the safety and security of the school community. SSAT is a web-based tool that focuses on protection (keeping people and property safe from threats and emergencies) and mitigation (reducing the damage or harm from safety-related incidents) and will help to apply the three physical security strategies of detection, delay, and response. https://bit.ly/3Tz0RJX

Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools (REMS)

Resources for site assessment teams and/or school planning teams to improve the safety and security of schools in the short term and long term. https://bit.ly/4ci3LtS

CISA K-12 School Security Guide

This guide shows how taking a systems-based approach to school physical security planning can help schools create safe and secure learning environments — without requiring school staff to become security experts or compromising the broader educational mission. The guide provides schools with actionable, practical, and cost-efficient resources and tools that enhance their safety and security postures. https://bit.ly/3Tjzpic

National Institute of Building Sciences

Protective design can reduce the risk of an active shooter incident and, if one occurs, can mitigate or reduce the number of potential victims. A facility, school, or office building should conduct a security risk assessment. This guide provides infrastructure risk assessment

information and resources to mitigate and reduce mitigate harm. https://bit.ly/3TzeMjb

Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) and *Education Week* video on school tip lines

Schools have scrambled to boost secure buildings, adding surveillance cameras and police officers. There is a lower cost, less intrusive measure that can help prevent school violence — encouraging students to report threats or other safety concerns to an anonymous tip line. Colorado started its statewide tip line after the Columbine shooting 20 years ago. The idea picked up after the Sandy Hook tragedy in 2012, and now, in the wake of Parkland, has taken off. The latest state to join this effort is Pennsylvania, where a new tip line has received thousands of tips in just the first month of operation. In this resource, PBS and *Education Week* take a look at how the effort is going, and whether tip lines work. https://bit.ly/4a30q02

Relevant CSBA board policies and administrative regulations

CSBA GAMUT Policy and Policy *Plus* subscribers have access to sample policies. The following are sample policies and administrative regulations that are relevant to infrastructure.

▸ BP/AR 0450 - Comprehensive Safety Plan

▸ BP 1112 - Media Relations

▸ BP/AR 1250 - Visitors/Outsiders

▸ BP/AR 3515 - Campus Security

▸ BP/AR 3515.2 - Disruptions

▸ BP 3515.21 - Unmanned Aircraft Systems (Drones)

▸ BP/AR 3515.3 - District Police/Security Department

▸ BP/AR 3516 - Emergencies and Disaster Preparedness Plan

▸ AR 3516.3 - Earthquake Emergency Procedure System

▸ AR 3517 - Facilities Inspection

▸ BP/AR 5142.2 - Safe Routes to School Program

▸ BP 7110 - Facilities Master Plan

▸ AR 7111 - Evaluating Existing Buildings

▸ AR 7160 - Charter School Facilities

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Endnotes

1   Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA). (2022). K-12 Security Guide 3rd Edition. Retrieved from https://bit.ly/3Tjzpic.

Armed Assailant Response for Schools: Concepts and Considerations for Options-based Response

by John Czajkowski, MM

IN THIS BRIEF:

▸ Options-based response defined

▸ Implementation and best practices of options-based responses

▸ Sample questions for board members

▸ Relevant guidance and resources

▸ Relevant board policies and administrative regulations

What is an options-based response?

Sometimes referred to as options-based protocols, options-based responses are safety and security procedures that provide a combination of clear guidelines and flexible options to apply to situations requiring localized or organization-wide responses. These options may be scaled alongside risk potential and overall situational awareness.

Evolving approaches to responding to armed assailants

The historic process of public and school safety improvement — both prevention efforts and in response to natural disasters such as tornadoes, earthquakes, or fires, and man-made threats such as school shootings — is commonly initiated by notable precipitating incidents. Deadly school fires, such as the 1958 fire at Our Lady of the Angels School in Chicago, Illinois, that killed 58 people, or the 1908 fire at Lakeview School in Collinwood, Ohio, that killed 175 individuals, all helped spur profound fire safety improvements in building materials, ventilation, fire suppression, fire alarms, egress protocols, and additional safety measures codified in building codes and state-level safety mandates.[1]

In recent decades, school mass shootings have arguably caused some of the highest levels of school safety concerns. These school massacres have elicited deeply emotional, complex, and varied reactions across sectors of education, law enforcement, behavioral health, and communities. Despite a growing body of knowledge and guidance about how to prevent and respond to a school shooting, local education leaders are faced with a high-stakes environment where many may still feel ill-prepared.

Board of education members play a critical leadership role in reviewing Comprehensive School Safety Plans (CSSPs) and district policies that contain logistical and administrative aspects of responding to security threats and incidents. Additionally, new legislation, Senate Bill 553, requires all employers with more than 10 employees to establish, implement, and maintain a Workplace Violence Prevention Plan (WVPP). Best practices for LEAs include continuing to coordinate and collaborate across departments, staff, and with partners to ensure that both the CSSP and the new WVPP are written, edited, and updated in tandem. More information on SB 553 is available in the resources section of this document.

Given the complexity of situations that involve active assailants, it is helpful for board members to familiarize themselves with key concepts of incident response and recommended preparation.

This brief discusses how informed governance teams can facilitate robust conversations with district staff, educational partners, and the appropriate agencies associated with keeping students and staff safe.

Columbine and a new emphasis on lockdowns

The 1999 Columbine High School shooting in Colorado shook up long-held school safety beliefs. This tragedy spurred critical new research on targeted violence prevention and helped reshape law enforcement responses to mass casualty incidents. The shooting

also ushered in a new era of tactical responses to school security incidents beyond the earthquake and fire drills historically conducted throughout California school systems and rehearsing lockdown protocols more consistently across education sectors.

Lockdown drills were met with mixed criticisms. Parents, students, advocates, and psychologists among others viewed them as a new form of apocalyptic Cold War-era fallout shelter drills that increased psychological stress without a commensurate guarantee of safety from an armed assailant. Unlike earthquake and fire guidelines expressed via legal mandates for education-related building codes and drills, the early 2000s featured only a very loose network of recommendations and guidance from education and law enforcement authorities for these evolving active shooter protocols.

Although the Columbine attack quickly spurred an emphasis on rote lockdown drills, additional lessons (targeted violence prevention and armed assailant organizational response) were documented that would take more than a decade to be felt throughout education sectors. The lengthy Columbine after-action report(s) provided a range of useful information.[2] To this day, the Columbine attack continues to serve as a dark touchstone for a small subculture, often obsessed with mass shooters, admiring them as a source of dark symbolism and, worse, inspiration for new attacks. Columbine remains important today as a dual cautionary tale with parallel lessons in targeted violence prevention (see related brief on Behavioral Threat Assessment and Comprehensive School Safety Plans.)

Sandy Hook as a catalyst for options-based response

Although there would be a gradual increase in school attacks in the years after Columbine, the 2012 Sandy Hook Elementary School attack touched a national nerve.[3] The ensuing post-investigation was supported and accompanied by a rigorous ongoing federal and academic study of a multidimensional problem.[4] The resulting federal options-based response guidance (often termed "Run-Hide-Fight") was the culmination of a broad analysis of school attacks by the Federal Bureau of Investigation and related criminological scholarship.

Sandy Hook spurred a re-examination of lockdown protocols that, from their inception, were rarely fully envisioned, taught and rehearsed with much nuance, flexibility, and rigor at school sites. Implementation of these new options-based protocols has been a complex, gradual, and uneven endeavor across education sectors in the years since 2013–14. Although these options-based recommendations have evolved in the past decade, the core themes have remained consistent with some variations in terminology and tactics, including some terms associated with commercial branding. This document will generally refer to the combination of guidance as "Run-Hide-Fight" while acknowledging that the guidance and terminology continue to evolve.[5]

Again, the detailed discussion below of the options-based protocols are provided to inform governance teams in preparation for safety planning conversations.

Reviewing the options-based responses

Some local educational agencies (LEAs) have embraced the challenges of adapting these recommendations into a standardized local protocol that is developmentally appropriate for students and acceptable to the local community. According to best practices, the protocol should be developed at the district and county levels in coordination with education and law enforcement partners.

Options-based approaches to managing and responding to incidents provide more flexibility and, therefore, opportunities for success. To adequately empower leaders and staff, however, they must be adequately trained and supported. Throughout all tactical response protocol development and training, education leaders should remain focused on at least three major educational and implementation parameters — what is developmentally appropriate; what constitutes basic, intermediate, and advanced skills; and what are areas where real capacity can be built versus those that will only provide exposure to concepts and techniques in the scope of education settings.

"Hide" builds on traditional lockdown basics

Training in these federal options-based concepts often reiterates that the terms run, hide, and fight are not intended to be a strictly sequential order. The key concept in the "hide" portion, seeking shelter in a safe location, may be the easiest to envision as an organization-wide strategy in education settings, so it will be discussed here first. This is particularly important in primary and secondary settings with wide ranges of ages and developmental levels.

The "hide" portion reinforces lockdown basics with enhancements beyond securing entrances to protecting occupants from forced entry with barricades, which requires specific training and practice. Additional emphasis is placed on attention to light and noise discipline, tactical concepts such as available "organic armor" (e.g., a flipped desk), avoiding "fatal funnels of fire" near doorways and/or windows, and many other practical details. Even with these additional concepts, the "hide" directive is still the most basic and fundamental component of an organization-wide response with a high return on investment. It is the area that can be most widely practiced and effectively implemented in a developmentally appropriate manner across a wide range of age and ability levels.

Training for hide options: Developmental progression toward building capacity

Although moving to safety and moving away from a threat may seem simple on its face, in a secondary education setting it should be seen as an intermediate skill, highly dependent on developmental levels. Moving to safety may be more straightforward for a single adult with good situational awareness. It is exponentially more complex for an employee to determine when to attempt to move a classroom of students. Nevertheless, it is a skill that can be trained in a progression that can build capacity gradually across an organization.

In primary school settings, moving to safety may be more complex because of multiple staggered breaks such as recess and lunch, but still necessary to consider because an attack can occur at all phases of the day. Therefore, it is recommended that LEAs endeavor to train and drill staff and students in these more dynamic options-based strategies, consult the most current guidance, and work together with law enforcement authorities to plan and implement appropriate strategies at the local level. It is highly recommended that more intermediate training occurs after the basics of "hide" have been successfully implemented. Establishing a confident progression of training goals can help contextualize conversations with those eager to quickly move to more intensive ideas. That progression can also redirect ideas that are not developmentally appropriate for students and/or education staff and may be better suited for first responders.

Training employees to act quickly and decisively to protect their students and themselves is essential. However, the decision to train students, and on what methods will be used, should be formed over time through a collaborative process with local education and community leaders.[6]

Drill documentation: Encourage, support, and capture the process

Educators are well equipped to appreciate the merit of systems that build in a progressive manner, require sequential instruction and assessment, and offer opportunities for feedback from all participants to better identify strengths and areas for growth. Educators are also mindful of the need for differentiation and formative assessments that drive next steps and potentially reinforce basics before progressing. Therefore, the LEA's security drill documentation forms should help support and capture this sometimes non-linear trajectory in a process of centralized LEA training support and centralized accountability.

The most useful documentation forms will indicate the objectives, methods, key leadership participants (education, law enforcement, and other partners), assessment and verification, and, most importantly, the lessons learned through the after-action review and shared through an open, transparent process with staff to drive a cycle of improvement. Drill forms that merely verify if the drill was done or not done are as useful as a classroom assessment that merely documented whether a student did or did not take the test.

Site surveys for a better hide: Know your strengths and vulnerabilities

Tactical response planning for the hide, or lockdown, option requires specific facility assessment to identify and adapt to a range of known vulnerabilities: door types, internal door configurations, locksets, glazing (windows), drapes/blinds, availability of barricade materials, etc. These assessments can be conducted with local and/or federal partners at no cost or by trained employees. Since many main office areas, counseling centers, libraries, and sometimes classrooms are constructed with large amounts of glass on or near the door locking mechanisms, identifying options for nearby safe rooms should be considered. If classrooms have excessive glass on or near the doors that cannot be barricaded, then further assessment and planning may be considered to reinforce those specific entrance

locations with clear Mylar shatter-resistant film to slow a forced entry. In an office setting, it may be advantageous to have planned safe rooms equipped with public address, phone, and any other emergency signaling technology so site leaders can simultaneously move occupants to safety while initiating all emergency signals and ongoing communications from a protected location. Some site survey formats can be overwhelmingly complex and not clearly distinguished between low- to medium-cost elements versus those requiring facility modernization or even new construction.[7] Rational return on investment and cross benefits should be a consideration throughout.[8]

When it's time to run: How to move to safety

Although primary and secondary education leaders may emphasize the "hide" and other associated elements of a reinforced lockdown as described previously, there are numerous conditions where one must move individually or even with others to a more secure location and/or away from the threat. For example, the Columbine attack was initiated during a lunch period. The multiple considerations of how to move to safety are too varied for this document; however, it is worth emphasizing that staying in a known unsafe location or intentionally moving towards a threat are universally unsound when there are still better options.

An example of moving toward safety could be a group of students in an outdoor area during an organized educational activity being successfully led off campus by a staff member in a direction away from the threat. Another common-sense example is occupants of an open office area, counseling center, or similar administration area with offices featuring glass on or near the doors moving quickly to known safe rooms that have additional levels of protection. More chaotic, and more difficult to train for, is a mixed scenario such as an attack initiated during a passing or lunch period (such as the Columbine scenario). In this more complex setting, individuals must be trained in the poor choices to avoid and the more optimal ones to seek out in the confusion and stress of the moment.

When is it time to fight? Last resort for survival

The "fight" component of national response guidance is the most controversial and anxiety provoking, particularly in the education sector. This is best viewed as a last-resort option when suddenly trapped and confronted by an armed assailant and no other course of action remains. Part of the beauty of public education is the diversity of employees that reflects our complex communities. Whereas some staff may have an innate competitive and protective mindsets and may embrace the concepts of a last resort defense and escape, many others may find it exceedingly difficult, if not inconceivable, to envision attempting to distract and/or disable an armed attacker.

As outlined above in the general training considerations, this final option will be an area where it is most difficult to build organizational capacity in an educational setting. Thus, it will most likely remain an area of exposure to concepts. Moreover, responsible minds must prevail when considering whether to expose any of

the concepts to students to ensure all concepts and training are developmentally appropriate and backed by the most current guidance from multiple sources.

Preparing for school incidents

Trauma care basics: Stop the bleed

School nurses are essential members of the school safety team, bringing a wealth of compassion, knowledge, and awareness of everyday routine medical situations for students. They are also familiar with areas of inappropriate and even illegal health-related conduct. During the chaos of an active shooter incident response, the school nurse will most likely be locking down or moving to safety — like all other employees and students.

Fortunately, many gunshot wounds are survivable if blood loss is rapidly managed with trauma care basics and followed by expedited transport to trauma care units. It is highly recommended that staff are trained and equipped with basic trauma care skills so lives can be saved despite severe injuries. School nurses can be powerful subject matter experts to help initiate, coordinate, and sustain this life-saving training that could also be useful in shop accidents and even outside of school for automobile accidents or other emergencies.

There's an app for that: Buyer beware

With a flood of new technologies for both learning and school safety, great care should be taken when assessing and choosing between the expanding school safety communications applications, emerging products, and artificial intelligence. It continues to be a best practice to seek references, pilot programs, and patiently assess the effectiveness of products leading up to full adoption. Hurrying towards wide adoption immediately in the wake of a widely publicized school shooting or similar tragedy is ill-advised. Some vendors have claimed their apps would call 911, but actually wouldn't when more closely scrutinized. Others couldn't be easily tested in drills as claimed. School safety apps may have a suite of additional, redundant features without scalable options. This is a place where governance teams, with their role as fiscal stewards for the LEA, can contribute by asking informed questions.

Considerations do not end at the point of purchase. Use of any security feature apps will require a clear delineation of user levels and authorities, and most importantly, standardized expectations for their use on a daily basis across a spectrum of incidents — from routine and less critical to the most infrequent and critical. User access will need to be routinely updated to reflect new hires and departures. Organizations must be mindful of the extremely wide range of comfort and familiarity employees have with mobile apps and overall tech savviness. Apps will almost inevitably require users

to voluntarily use a personal device. Lastly, if there is any expectation that the app will also be used by local law enforcement, the standard must be clarified between School Resource Officers (SROs), patrol and dispatch, and it is recommended this be documented in a memorandum of understanding. General caution is advised when selecting any app where there are organization-wide expectations for life safety.

Crisis communications planning

Communicating clear, accurate, timely information to either alert or to inform parents/guardians and the community will pose tremendous challenges in the ongoing aftermath of a school shooting or crisis. Careful, advanced communication planning with all partners will help increase the chances for the most coordinated, controlled, and professional flow of information in a crisis. For more information on this topic see the Crisis Communications brief.

Secure campus: Something less than lockdown

For the numerous non-life-threatening situations where additional control and protection is needed, LEAs are encouraged to develop an organization-wide security posture short of full lockdown where education routine can be maintained indoors behind locked doors and a controlled perimeter.

This protocol may be employed for scenarios such as:

‣ dangerous animals/insects on or near campus;

‣ police activity in the vicinity not requiring lockdown; or

‣ searching for persons at risk.

It may also be used as one of several options and/or layers to a suspected weapons possession or bomb threat response. This is a simple, but highly valuable tool to meet the strategic objective of balancing physical and psychological safety — particularly when the situation does not warrant bringing the normal education routine to a complete stop.

The terminology varies for this less-than-lockdown protocol, but as an example, it is referred to as "Secure Campus" across the 42 districts in San Diego County as a standardized protocol. A Secure Campus protocol takes time and refreshing to be absorbed into local law enforcement departments that are unaccustomed to it. Coordination with supporting partners is essential to ensuring smooth operations that both increase physical control and lessen anxiety. After developing and coordinating any new protocol with partners, it must be trained and rehearsed along with other drills to ensure that staff, students, media points of contact, and community are all familiar with the change, purpose, common terminology, and anticipated language when used.

Responding to school incidents

Suspected weapons possession: Discreet, coordinated options

Any time a weapon (firearm or bladed, edged weapon) is brandished, the best option is to activate a lockdown/armed assailant response. However, the response to a suspected weapons possession should generally be viewed as a broader options-based scenario, where ideally: 911 is rapidly called and provided all available information from the person most knowledgeable — clarifying that it is suspected and not brandished; loud, organization-wide responses that could escalate the situation are avoided as an automatic step; and the potential armed person is discreetly monitored. When law enforcement partners arrive, a rapid assessment of all available information will then help determine the most prudent (usually joint) response given a host of variables. Therefore, it is recommended that LEAs develop protocols for these more nuanced situations with local law enforcement and train employees to conduct a more discreet and restrained response than in a "loud" or overt lockdown, or similar.

Employees should not be expected to search for weapons alone. A lack of clear protocol can place well-meaning employees in dangerous situations when trying to solve emergent problems without proper guidance, training, and resources. There are examples of administrators and campus security staff being shot or stabbed while attempting to conduct a weapons search alone, without support from law enforcement partners who are specifically trained and equipped to manage the many foreseeable weapons outcomes. SROs are appropriate support in these situations, when available, since they are familiar with the education environment, staff, students, and organizational sensitivities, and the risks posed by public embarrassment.

Bomb threats: Joint decision making when time is essential

Many LEAs may still be operating with a rigid bomb threat protocol that essentially provides only one option — full evacuation. In recent years, the options-based strategic view has also begun to encompass more varied, flexible, coordinated responses to bomb threats, where evacuation may in fact be deemed warranted; however, it may not be en masse as in an earthquake or fire response.[9] Even this basic response option may be modified to occur in stages and coordinated with searches with law enforcement agency partners.

It is relatively complex to assemble a functional bomb, but relatively easy to acquire firearms, so a known evacuation protocol, or an evacuation without law enforcement partners first assessing and providing exterior security, could inadvertently expose the evacuees to a shooting threat with the bomb threat as a ruse. Although anonymous online threats and recorded messages with spoofed numbers have become far more common, staff should still be trained on how to manage and report a phoned threat with a caller still on the line.[10] It is recommended that county offices of education and districts partner with local law enforcement partners, review current guidance, and establish a matrix of options and processes that can be selected according to assessed risk.

Hoax threats

Anonymous hoax threats have become a worsening trend in recent years, creating a painful thorn in the side of the collective school and law enforcement community. There is not often clear guidance for how to best manage these incidents, which have the potential to cause deep community concerns when the threats are communicated overtly, on social media, or other means that receive wide attention. The following are some key considerations for school leaders.

Imminent risk or time to assess further?

Ultimately, principals and law enforcement must treat every threat as potentially real and credible until they can objectively determine otherwise. There are no easy answers for how best to manage these cases. As with any school safety-related investigation and/or response, a unified decision process should ideally assess if there is an imminent risk that must be addressed, or if there is more time to step back and assess further. In many cases, the nature of hoax threats do not make this distinction clear. Behavioral threat assessment, addressed further in a companion brief, is usually a discreet process conducted quietly in the background to gradually determine threat potential. However, assessing what may appear to be hoax threats (to experienced law enforcement and educators' eyes) often occurs in a more overt, emotionally charged, and faster pace environment. Administrators and law enforcement working together need latitude to assess, communicate, and respond as they deem appropriate to their local situation.

Unseen costs of hoaxes

Schools and LEAs that have experienced repeated threats feel the cost that may be discernable in cumulative stress, erosion of trust, and lost attendance. Hoax threats victimize the collective school community and may unnecessarily feed into a pessimistic narrative that experiencing a school shooting is an inevitable part of life. The impacts of school threats, including hoaxes, are addressed in a separate companion brief.

There is an increased expectation for transparency in public education, and issues with investigative and tactical options should be communicated transparently when able, but clearly when more appropriate. Public communications can remind the community that all threats are taken very seriously and fully investigated by school administration and law enforcement partners, with reminders of how to submit tips. At the same time, it may also be cautioned that information must be limited for details of ongoing investigations

and other sensitive tactical options. The latter can seem emotionally unsatisfying to community members that desire more real-time details, but this is an expectation that cannot be met on a consistent basis. Ultimately, principals should be supported by LEAs to consider communicating more assertively about overly communicated threats that have the potential to be disruptive without feeling pressured to take actions that are not warranted by the facts.

Removing the veil of anonymity and providing consequences

Sometimes, administration and law enforcement investigating in close cooperation can learn the identity of the anonymous threat makers, but oftentimes they cannot without reaching out to social media platforms. Emergency Disclosure Requests (EDRs) are a powerful tool that can sometimes be used by local and federal law enforcement agencies to obtain identifying information about anonymous threat makers from social media providers, but there must be a higher level of potential risk communicated in the online posting to warrant this process.

Reunification

Following safety incidents, LEAs are often tasked with reunifying students with their parents or legal guardians. Planning reunification strategies in advance can lessen the stress and confusion often associated with such incidents. The following are some considerations for governance teams to understand when discussing safety plans.

LEA-supported remote reunification

Although reunification is a relatively straightforward concept — to reunify children with their parents or guardians — even reunifying due to a relatively low-stress situation may pose several unique administrative, logistical, supervision, and access-control challenges. All schools should be prepared to conduct reunifications for low-intensity (lower stress) events at their own site, and without considerable additional support from the LEA beyond normal support such as transportation. A common low-stress incident could be an extended power outage on a sweltering day.

However, for higher-intensity incidents such as a fire or a school shooting, a school should not be expected to support its own reunification. Moreover, the reunification for a critical incident should ideally be held several miles from the incident location, but not so far as to pose additional challenges to families without cars. It is understood that bringing anxious parents and guardians into a crisis area that will likely be crowded, if not blocked, by numerous responding agencies is ill advised. Therefore, LEAs must invest in a thorough LEA-supported remote reunification process for critical

incidents. During these worst-case scenarios, the impacted school will be concerned with supervising students on buses and then at the reunification area if able. In the ongoing aftermath of a school shooting, the LEA owes the public the most organized, safe, well-communicated process it can provide. It is highly foreseeable that the anxiety and unknowns present will test even the best, most well-rehearsed, and coordinated plan.[11]

Identify and study reunification sites in advance

It is highly recommended that LEAs identify several suitable LEA facilities across the region that can accommodate the full logistics anticipated for a remote reunification, up to the very largest schools. If the reunification locations are other school sites, then ideally, they consist of a large capacity gym and access features that will help manage the anticipated vehicle and foot traffic. There may be cases where alternate non-LEA facilities must be considered as well. After sites are identified, these sites should be surveyed by the leadership teams from the LEA who will be running the reunification operations there so they can hone the plan on paper into one that is practical and workable on the actual site. Consultation with experts and emergency responders during the comprehensive school safety planning process is essential for such decisions.

Transportation

The transportation planning process should prepare multiple options for pick-up locations nearby each site with a safe standoff distance determined by the LEA and local law enforcement. Some police departments have prepared the option to have specially trained officers drive the buses from the pre-established safe locations near the school (within a half-mile) to the actual incident location. Advanced planning can help review all relevant details (on paper and at the actual locations) for the safe area, near the incident location, and reunification site away from the incident location, such as:

- safe paths of travel;
- bus turning radiuses;
- additional rooms for command centers;
- special education needs; and
- parent/guardian crisis notification, etc.

Logistics should be optimized to maintain the strongest chain of custody for students as possible. Safety and accountability will be the primary objectives, so there should be systems put into place that are redundant and can keep accurate records of who was picked up and dropped off.

Putting systems in place

Incident Command System

The Incident Command System (ICS) is a "standardized approach to the command, control and coordination of on-scene incident management, providing a common hierarchy within which personnel from multiple organizations can work."[12] A comprehensive reunification plan requires a coordinated command, control, and communications process utilizing the standardized terminology, concepts, and processes per the federal National Incident Management System (NIMS) guidance.[13] Some educators have more familiarity with NIMS than others, as it is commonly an area requiring additional training.

Shared, or unified, command is a common concept when coordinating a complex response where authorities are shared between multiple agencies. However, there will also be many elements of the response exclusively controlled by law enforcement, as the incident location will become an active crime scene under law enforcement tactical control. Staff, students, and visitors may be evacuated from the impacted site before it is entirely secured by a rigorous SWAT [special weapons and tactics] team sweep or similar and there are numerous possibilities that must be coordinated with law enforcement partners in advance to clarify who oversees what, when, and where.

There are also many command and control aspects that will remain the responsibility of the LEA — particularly the reunification process, safely away from the incident location. Nevertheless, law enforcement support at the reunification location will be highly sought to help manage transportation, traffic, and on-site security. It is easy to understand why the main law enforcement focus will be at the incident location, but through careful coordination and planning, they can also appreciate the needs of the LEA away from the incident.

Emergency Operations Center

The Emergency Operations Center (EOC) is the physical or virtual hub, or centralized location, of all coordination of emergency response and recovery operations. EOC uses the ICS to coordinate and communicate with multiple agencies and partners in an emergency. Smaller LEAs may choose to engage LEA emergency command and control functions from existing board conference rooms or similar facilities. Larger LEAs commonly prefer to establish dedicated (or dual use) EOCs. Local law enforcement partners and employees with formalized operational emergency management experience from government, military, law enforcement, utilities and related fields can be helpful in tailoring a new EOC that is aligned with an LEA's size, needs, and foreseeable natural disaster and emergency response requirements. When setting up an EOC, LEAs should identify all local, county, and even state and federal authorities/partners to establish clear lines of communication and authorities with in advance. This recommendation is easy to add to a document, but it requires a dedicated, ongoing effort to build these partnerships and relationships so that they are as robust as possible prior to a major incident response.

Staffing and training

LEAs that have invested in an emergency management response may find it to be a years-long process to feel adequately prepared. Staff from an LEA's student support services, special education, and mental health teams, as well as nurses and campus security may form the central ICS leadership of the reunification team, and the LEA will likely draw on employees suited for this critical work from a variety of other departments. Periodically, these teams will need to be restaffed and retrained. It is critical that all school staff are trained on the site's safety plans, and that staff understand their roles and responsibilities in following the safety plan.[14]

Changes in local law enforcement leadership, policy, and staffing can bring improvements and adjustments to previous plans as well. It is recommended that when LEAs feel ready, they conduct tabletop exercises in a joint environment with the partners and departments involved with the planning process as well as a range of employee units who will need to respond and communicate (or not) throughout all phases of the response operation.

Preparation pays extra dividends

Developing, coordinating, training, and exercising an LEA-supported remote reunification plan can be a complex, albeit rewarding, process with multiple cross-benefits that can enrich many other aspects of an LEA's disaster and emergency management capabilities. Even if an LEA is never called upon to activate this plan in a real-world emergency, it can still pay multiple dividends during calmer times.

Athletics event safety and security

Athletics events present an additional consideration for safety planning. The California Interscholastic Federation (CIF) has published a wealth of resources to help LEAs safely conduct a spectrum of athletic events. The past decade has seen innovation and development of several athletic safety resources — from simple checklists to products associated with the national program, Emergency Action Plan. The broadly comprehensive nature of athletics — ranging from preventing and responding to injuries, sportsmanship, student behavior (e.g., harassment, hazing, etc.), and many others — requires guidance beyond event security and crowd management; therefore, LEA support may be a joint venture between athletics, student support services, school safety and more. Moreover, it should be clear where all related athletic guidance is housed to ensure information is disseminated in a coherent manner.

The substantive CIF Game and Crowd Management Guidelines may be included as an annex within the CSSP.[15] Structured planning is recommended prior to all athletic events — large or small — to establish coordinated supervision, access, crowd management, and contingency response capabilities. Even with smaller games, clear command, control, and communication expectations should be established in this pre-event planning. Some LEAs have programmed all school radios with common special event channels to ease coordination for athletic events and other activities between two or more different LEA schools. Contingency plans must be in place for a range of scenarios, such as fighting, weapons (suspected and brandished), or even dangerous criminal activity. No event planner wants to be caught flat-footed without adequate response options for these and other scenarios. Simple acts like preparing planned public address scripts or supplying extra radios or extra sets of keys for egress or shelter options can be useful in many situations.

If LEAs intend to hire local law enforcement to provide event support, it is recommended law enforcement are a part of, or at least privy to, the pre-event planning process. Ideally, law enforcement will have school radios and be fully integrated into the contingency planning. When LEA leaders use the standardized language and concepts of the NIMS and ICS with law enforcement (e.g., "Ms. Sanchez will serve as the school's incident commander"), it helps establish an increased expectation of unified command, control, trust, and communications between partners.

Athletics provide invaluable experiences and life lessons that may be hard to provide in the classroom alone. Therefore, providing these extracurricular opportunities in the safest manner possible is essential. LEAs are encouraged to develop ongoing relationships with their regional CIF directors to stay abreast of the latest safety resources and guidance and remain attentive to new changes.

Questions for governance teams to consider

One way in which governance teams can support effective planning for their LEAs' options-based protocol is to ask informed questions during the development and review of comprehensive safety plans, during policy adoption, and in meetings in which safety topics are being discussed. Below are some questions board members may consider asking:

▸ **Staffing and internal coordination**

Are LEA administrative and staff leaders identified with operational decision-making authorities clarified?

Are site administrative and staff leaders identified with authorities clarified?

Are thresholds established for internal and LEA notifications, law enforcement notifications, and ICS activation?

▸ **Partnerships and external coordination**

To what extent are relationships established with local law enforcement (SROs, etc.), local county office of education, city/county/state offices of emergency services, local media, and neighboring/feeder/destination LEAs?.

▸ **Protocol**

Are protocols developed in accordance with local partners with considerations from Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools and other federal guidance?

Is there documentation to satisfy a range of training, drill, student support, criminal and civil law expectations?

▸ **Implementation**

To what extent is there adequate training for all staff (per California Education Code Sections 32280–32289.5)?

Does the LEA prioritize an annual or periodic cycle of training for the Comprehensive School Safety Committees or designee teams (e.g., principal, assistant principal, school psychologist, counselor, nurse, teacher(s), campus assistant/security, custodial, administrative assistant(s), etc.)?

Relevant resources

California Legislative Information

Senate Bill 906 (2021–22) — School Safety: Homicide threats

SB 906 requires LEAs to annually notify parents and guardians of proper firearm storage and laws related to the safe storage of firearms. The entirety of text of the bill can be found here: https://csba.pub/4ciktJA.

SB 553 (2023–24) — Occupational safety: workplace violence: restraining orders and workplace violence prevention plan

SB 553 requires an employer to establish, implement, and maintain an effective workplace violence prevention plan, to provide training for employees on the plan, and to provide additional training when the plan is updated, or a new workplace violence hazard has been identified. The entirety of text of the bill can be found here: SB 553 Occupational safety: workplace violence: restraining orders and workplace violence prevention plan. https://csba.pub/3U62cse

Active shooter/armed assailant response resources

The REMS TA Center is operated by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Safe and Supportive Schools. Active Shooter Situations: Responding to an Active Shooter Situation Guidance. https://csba.pub/3PlwQuM

US Department of Homeland Security Preparedness, Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA). CISA aims to enhance active shooter preparedness through a "whole community" approach. Active Shooter Preparedness. https://csba.pub/4cjdq3I

SchoolSafety.gov was created by the federal government to provide schools and districts with actionable recommendations to create safe and supportive learning environments for students and educators. https://csba.pub/49Rc0LP

NASP and NASRO Best Practice Considerations for Armed Assailant Drills in Schools. The updated document provides guidance on the important factors that schools must take into account when considering and conducting armed assailant drills. https://csba.pub/4awpcpJ

Physical infrastructure security

REMS K-12 Site Assessment Resources 2021. REMS TA Center facilitates the collaborative "walk around" and examination of the school building and grounds to increase safety, security, accessibility, and emergency preparedness. https://csba.pub/3VdrDcd

Cybersecurity & Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) K-12 School Security Guide 3rd Edition 2022 https://csba.pub/49Q6pW9

Whole Building Design Guide. Active Shooter: A Role for Protective Design. 2021. https://csba.pub/3wWTfbx

Official school shooting reports

The Report of Governor Bill Owens: Columbine Review Commission 2001 https://csba.pub/3PkOa33

Virginia Tech Review Panel 2007 https://csba.pub/3lEuTpo

Report on Sandy Hook Investigation 2013 https://csba.pub/3vanrzo

Reunification

US Department of Education Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools (REMS) Guidance for Reunification https://csba.pub/49UZcUU

REMS Fact Sheet for Reunification https://csba.pub/4awpInF

Bomb threats

FEMA Weapons of Mass Destruction Training Manual: "Understanding and Planning for School Bomb Incidents" Participant Guide. https://csba.pub/3VeaHSX

DHS Bomb Threat Checklist https://csba.pub/3TCpG83

Athletic event management references and key resources

California Interscholastic Federation (CIF) https://csba.pub/3wRPCDM

CIF Game and Crowd Management Guidelines https://csba.pub/49W2mIa

CIF Administrative Oversight Plan https://csba.pub/4acTT2P

CIF Sportsmanship Checklist https://csba.pub/3TzBasW

CIF Emergency Action Plan https://csba.pub/3PlKRZf

Relevant CSBA board policies and administrative regulations

CSBA GAMUT Policy and Policy *Plus* subscribers have access to sample policies. The following are sample policies and administrative regulations that are relevant to options-based responses.

▸ BP 0400 - Comprehensive Plans

▸ BP/AR 0450 - Comprehensive Safety Plan

▸ BP 1100 - Communication with the Public

▸ BP 1112 - Media Relations

▸ BP/AR 1114 - District-Sponsored Social Media

▸ BP/AR 3515 - Campus Security

▸ BP/AR 3515.2 - Disruptions

▸ BP/AR 3515.3 - District Police/Security Department

▸ BP 3516/ AR 3516 - Emergency and Disaster Preparedness

▸ AR 3516.1 - Fire Drills and Fires

▸ AR 3516.2 - Bomb Threats

▸ AR 3516.3 - Earthquake Emergency Procedure System

▸ BP 3516.5 - Emergency Schedules

▸ BP/AR 3517 - Facilities Inspection

▸ BP 3540 - Transportation

▸ BP 4231 - Staff Development

▸ BP/AR 5131.7 - Weapons and Dangerous Instruments

▸ BP 5131.8 - Mobile Communication Devices

▸ BP/AR 5144 - Discipline

▸ BP/AR 5144.11 - Suspension and Expulsion/Due Process

▸ AR 5144.2 - Suspension and Expulsion/Due Process (Students with Disabilities)

▸ BP/AR 6145.2 - Athletic Competition

▸ BP/AR 6159.1 - Procedural Safeguards and Complaints for Special Education

▸ BP 6159.4 - Behavioral Interventions for Special Education Students

- BP/AR 6164.4 - Identification and Evaluation of Individuals for Special Education
- BP/AR 6164.5 - Student Success Teams
- BP/AR 6164.6 - Identification and Education Under Section 504

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Endnotes

1   National Fire Protection Association: US School Fires, Grades K-12 with 10 or More Deaths. https://csba.pub/49W2yXU

2   The Report of Governor Bill Owens' Columbine Review Commission: Hon. William H. Erickson, Chairman. (May 2001). https://csba.pub/3TkbRJN

3   Virgina Tech Review Panel. Mass Shootings at Virginia Tech: Report of the Review Panel. (4-15-2007). https://csba.pub/3IEuTpo

4   Report of the State's Attorney for the Judicial District of Danbury on the Shootings at Sandy Hook Elementary School. Office Of The State's Attorney Judicial District Of Danbury. Stephen J. Sedensky III. (11-25-2013). https://csba.pub/3Ta6m0o

5   US Department of Education Readiness and Emergency Management. Active Shooter Situations: Responding to An Active Shooter Situation. (4-19-21). https://csba.pub/3PlwQuM

6   National Association of School Psychologists and National Association of School Resource Officers: Best Practice Considerations for Armed Assailant Drills in Schools. (April 2020). https://csba.pub/4awpcpJ

7   Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools. K-12 Site Assessment Resources. (2021). https://csba.pub/3VdrDcd

8   Whole Building Design Guide. Active Shooter: A Role for Protective Design. (4-30-23). https://csba.pub/3wWTfbx

9   The Federal Emergency Management Agency. Publication 1. (2016). https://csba.pub/3VfJCyz

10 DHS Bomb Threat Checklist. (2014). www.cisa.gov. https://csba.pub/49Q32i7

11 U.S. Department of Education Readiness and Emergency Management. Creating, Practicing, And Implementing Plans for Family Reunification Before, During, And After an Emergency. https://csba.pub/4awpInF

12 National Incident Management System (NIMS). (October 2022). Emergency Operations Center How-to Quick Reference Guide. https://csba.pub/3PjSzDa

13 U.S. Federal Emergency Management Agency. National Incident Management System. https://csba.pub/3TB8EqE

14 California Legislative Information. School Safety Plans. https://csba.pub/3Tkd0RB

15 California Interscholastic Federation. Game and Crowd Management Guidelines. (12-2-2012). https://csba.pub/49W2mIa

Sexual Violence, Trafficking, Harassment, and Title IX

by Derby Pattengill

IN THIS BRIEF:

▸ Sexual violence and human trafficking defined

▸ Brief overview of harassment and Title IX

▸ Actions boards can take against sexual violence

▸ Sample questions for board members

▸ Relevant guidance and resources

▸ Relevant board policies and administrative regulations

The subject of school safety touches on many difficult topics beyond the risks of campus shootings or assaults. Governance teams must also address the prevention and response to sexual exploitation, harassment, and other forms of sexual violence. From policies to trauma-informed education, a foundational understanding of key issues and responsibilities can help board members ask informed questions when making decisions for their school districts or county offices of education.

The first portion of this brief provides a high-level overview of key terms and issues related to sexual violence, exploitation, and related areas. The second portion describes ways in which boards can support policies and school practices that create safer conditions for students through their governance role.

What is sexual violence?

Sexual violence can be used to describe a range of crimes, including sexual assault, rape, sexual abuse, exploitation, incest, date rape, and human trafficking.[1] Sexual violence can also consist of sexual harassment; indecent exposure; forced sexual acts between children; stalking, showing, or distributing sexual images without consent; and other forms of violence or misogyny.

Research shows that sexual violence is widespread and has traumatic and long-lasting effects, not only on the victims, but also on their families.[2] According to data from the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights, there were 14,938 incidents of sexual violence in K–12 schools in 2017–18 compared with 9,649 in 2015–16, representing a 55 percent increase.[3] These include incidents of rape, attempted rape, and sexual assault.[4] Members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, intersexual, asexual/aromantic/agender (LGBTQ+) community are disproportionately reflected in the data as victims of sexual violence.[5]

It is crucial for educators, administrators, parents, and students to be aware of these forms of sexual violence and to work collaboratively to create a safe and supportive school environment.

Sexual violence and Title IX:

Sexual violence in K-12 schools can take various forms, and it is essential to understand these manifestations to prevent and address them. One such form of sexual violence, sexual harassment, includes unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, or other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature that interferes with a student's education.

Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, 20 U.S.C. §1681, prohibits sex discrimination, including sexual harassment (referred to in Title IX as "sex-based harassment") in schools. It states, "No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance." While this brief does not provide an exhaustive exploration of Title IX or provide direct legal guidance, ensuring a local educational agency's (LEA) compliance with Title IX is one important way to improve safety.

Under Title IX, prohibited sex-based harassment can occur in person or online through electronic communication, social media, or text messages. Although not addressed specifically within Title IX, it is important to remember that when students share explicit images or messages without consent, it can lead to further exploitation and harassment.[6] Sex-based harassment also includes sexual assault, non-consensual touching or groping, and other forms of sexual violence.

Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network (RAINN) defines grooming as a tool abusers use to gain access to their victims. Grooming involves manipulative behaviors that can take place online or in person.

Grooming behavior patterns can include:

Victim selection: Abusers often observe possible victims and select them based on ease of access or perceived vulnerability.

Gaining access and isolating: Physically or emotionally separating a victim from those protecting them and seeking out positions in which they have contact with minors.

Trust development and keeping secrets: Gaining trust through gifts, attention, sharing "secrets," and other means to make them feel that they have a caring relationship and to train them to keep the relationship secret.

Desensitization to touch and discussion of sexual topics: Touching a victim in ways that appear harmless: hugging, wrestling and tickling, and later escalating to increasingly more sexual contact, such as massages or showering together. Abusers may show victims porno-graphy or discuss sexual topics with them to introduce the idea of sexual contact.

Attempt to make the behavior seem natural to avoid raising suspicions. Teens, who may be closer in age to the abuser, may have a harder time recognizing tactics used in grooming.

Human trafficking

Human trafficking is the exploitation of an individual through force, coercion, or deception. Human trafficking, in the form of labor or sex trafficking, is a worldwide problem that impacts millions of individuals.[7] In a press statement on Jan. 19, 2023, the U.S. State Department reported that nearly 28 million people are trafficked worldwide.[8] While precise data on California's children and youth is not available, the National Human Trafficking Hotline states that of 1,334 cases reported in 2021, 20 percent involved minors.[9]

Human trafficking can impact K-12 students in many ways, and this section offers general background on potential indicators that a student has experienced or is experiencing sexual trafficking. It is important to remember that these indicators are not definitive proof of human trafficking but should raise concerns and prompt further investigation. As mandated reporters, staff, teachers, counselors,

and administrators should be trained to recognize these signs and follow established reporting procedures to protect students and involve appropriate authorities. Collaboration with local law enforcement and child protective services is crucial in addressing suspected cases of human trafficking within the school community.

Students may or may not exhibit signs that suggest they are being trafficked, and many indicators can also be signs of other issues.[10] There are, however, some behaviors or home conditions of which educators should be aware that may be associated with exploitation. Drastic changes in a student's behavior, such as withdrawal from friends, changes in hygiene, or increased aggression, may signal emotional distress or manipulation. Some traffickers use drugs to control their victims. Educators should be trained to look for signs of substance abuse, unexplained drug paraphernalia, or sudden shifts in a student's behavior related to substance use.

Human trafficking often involves grooming, manipulation, and exploitation of vulnerable students. Grooming is a process in which a trafficker builds trust and dependency with a potential victim. This may involve excessive gifts, attention, or favoritism from an older individual. School staff are advised to watch for unverified adults who frequently visit or pick up a student from school, especially if they do not have legal custody or are not school-approved guardians. Adults or older students may engage in grooming behavior to manipulate and exploit younger students sexually.[11] Students may also be pressured or coerced into engaging in sexual activities against their will.[12]

Students who are consistently absent from school, especially those with no apparent explanation, or who have a sudden decline in their academic performance may be at risk of trafficking because traffickers may keep their victims out of school to maintain control.[13]

Other potential indicators of trafficking include:

- Sudden possession of expensive items a student cannot afford, such as designer clothing or electronics

- Multiple cell phones or communication devices

- Frequent changes in a student's residence, especially if they move in with an older individual[14]

Some traffickers force students into the commercial sexual exploitation of children. California Penal Code 236.1 states that, "sex trafficking of juveniles is separately defined as causing, inducing, persuading, or attempting to cause, induce or persuade a minor to engage in a commercial sex act."[15] California is ranked number one in the United States for sex trafficking, with 2,122 individuals trafficked in 2021, 246 cases (cases may involve more than one victim) involved minors.[16]

Educators and other LEA staff should be vigilant for signs of commercial sexual exploitation, such as having multiple partners or unexplained sexual activity (overt and/or inappropriate sexual behavior with peers and/or teachers). Victims of trafficking may exhibit signs of emotional manipulation, such as being overly submissive or fearful of certain individuals. Traffickers often isolate their victims

from their friends and family to exert control. A student who cuts off communication with loved ones may be at risk. Victims may be closely monitored and unable to speak freely. They may seem anxious or fearful when discussing their relationships.

What can boards do to address the issue of sexual violence?

There are several ways that governing boards can address sexual violence and other forms of exploitation. The remainder of this brief outlines some of these opportunities for improving student safety and well-being.

Establish comprehensive policies

LEAs are encouraged to develop a set of comprehensive policies that explicitly address sexual violence prevention, reporting, and response. This brief provides a list of sample policies available to CSBA GAMUT Policy and Policy *Plus* subscribers (see page 4). Forming a subcommittee or task force dedicated to addressing prevention and reporting can be useful when drafting or updating relevant policies. LEAs are advised to collaborate with experts, educators, students, parents, and community organizations to gather resources and educate on the risks of sexual violence. LEAs are also encouraged to seek legal counsel to ensure compliance with state and federal laws and to review the U.S. Department of Education's Title IX guidance. In addition to CSBA's sample policies, board members may also review model policies from organizations such as the Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network (RAINN) or the National Center for Safe Supportive Learning Environments.

Prevention and education programs

Best practices to prevent sexual violence include implementing evidence-based prevention and education programs that promote healthy relationships, consent, and bystander intervention, and using appropriate curriculum materials and resources. Professional development for educators and staff is encouraged to deliver these programs effectively. Staff should evaluate the impact of these programs regularly, share relevant findings with the board, and adjust as needed. LEAs are also encouraged to seek guidance from organizations such as Futures Without Violence or Love is Respect or collaborate with local community organizations that specialize in sexual violence prevention.

Reporting and support systems

It is imperative that LEAs establish clear reporting mechanisms for students and staff and ensure access to support services for survivors of sexual violence. LEAs can develop a confidential reporting system and ensure staff are trained to respond appropriately. Partnering with local crisis centers or counseling services for survivors and providing information on available resources to students and families

supports access. LEAs can consult with organizations such as RAINN or a local domestic violence and sexual assault services provider. Governance teams are encouraged to familiarize themselves with Title IX's requirements related to reporting sex-based harassment, as well as LEAs' legal duty to respond to harassment allegations.

Regular assessment and improvement

LEAs are encouraged to establish a system for regular assessment and improvement of sexual violence prevention and response efforts. This can be done by conducting annual surveys or focus groups with students and staff to gather feedback and reviewing and updating policies and programs based on feedback and evolving best practices. Additionally, monitoring and reporting on the effectiveness of these efforts to the community builds trust and aids communication. LEAs can use tools and resources provided by the National Sexual Violence Resource Center and stay informed about changes in relevant laws and regulations.

Questions for governance teams to consider

By following suggested recommendations and asking questions, governance teams can take significant steps toward addressing sexual violence and creating safer learning environments for all students. Collaboration with education and community partners and ongoing evaluation of policies and programs are key to success in this endeavor. In addition to familiarizing themselves with local compliance with Title IX regulations, board members can review the questions below to inform discussions with LEA staff.

1) How can the LEA ensure that our sexual harassment and violence policies are inclusive and consider the unique needs of all students, including those with disabilities, LGBTQ students, students with language barriers, and students from diverse backgrounds?

2) How can the LEA provide clear guidelines on reporting procedures, confidentiality, and support for survivors? What measures will be taken to protect the confidentiality of survivors?

3) How can the LEA ensure that prevention programs are age-appropriate and culturally sensitive?

4) How will the LEA measure the effectiveness of these programs and make necessary adjustments?

5) How can the LEA ensure that the reporting process is accessible and sensitive to the needs of all students, including LGBTQ students, students from diverse backgrounds, and those with disabilities or language barriers?

6) How will the LEA track and measure progress in reducing sexual violence incidents within the LEA?

7) How can the LEA ensure ongoing community engagement and transparency in its efforts?

8) How does the LEA communicate policies/reporting procedures to students and parents?

9) What mental health resources are available through the LEA for survivors of sexual exploitation to access?

Relevant resources

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

Information in English and Spanish on sexual violence and sex trafficking, including fast facts, resources and prevention strategies. https://csba.pub/43mHK9h

National Center on Safe and Supportive Learning Environments

School climate information, implementation resources, and tools for administrators, educators, staff, families, and community members. https://csba.pub/3TewtmZ

For educators and staff

Safe Place to Learn Implementation Guide

For administration and staff of students in kindergarten through high school, to address topics such as sexual harassment and violence in kindergarten through grade 12. https://csba.pub/49Svekq

Leading a Safe Place to Learn: Implementation Guide for Administrators

Guide and resource package on three topics for creating a school community committed to preventing sexual harassment, which includes sexual violence. Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 (Title IX) protects people from discrimination based on sex in education programs and activities that receive federal financial assistance. Among other sex discrimination prohibitions, Title IX protects against sexual harassment, including sexual violence. https://csba.pub/3TgUjhY

U.S. Department of Education

Sexual harassment resources from the U.S. Department of Education include an FAQ on sexual harassment and sexual violence, a checklist for addressing sexual harassment, and a Q&A on campus sexual misconduct. https://csba.pub/3TCU2ay

National Sexual Violence Resource Center

Information sheet on facts about sexual violence and its impacts on victims. https://csba.pub/3TBSDRl

National Sexual Assault Hotline

Call **800.656.HOPE** to be connected with a RAINN support specialist or a local center from RAINN's network of more than 1,000 sexual assault service providers throughout the country. Survivors and loved ones can access help online (online.rainn.org) through a chat-based platform on any internet-connected device. The confidential platform provides support to thousands of survivors each month, many of whom are disclosing their experience for the first time.

The Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CDE)

This California Department of Education webpage provides a current list of resources that provide information about the prevention and identification of commercial sexual exploitation of children, in addition to supports for survivors. https://csba.pub/3vdZ6Zy

Relevant CSBA board policies and administrative regulations

CSBA GAMUT Policy and Policy *Plus* subscribers have access to sample policies. The following are sample policies and administrative regulations relevant to sexual violence and Title IX.

▸ BP 0400 - Comprehensive Plans

▸ BP 0410 - Nondiscrimination in District Programs and Activities

▸ BP/AR 4030 - Nondiscrimination in Employment

▸ BP/E(1) 4119.12/4219.12/4319.12 - Title IX Sexual Harassment Complaint Procedures

▸ BP/AR 5131.2 - Bullying

▸ BP 5137 - Positive School Climate

▸ BP/AR 5141.4 - Child Abuse Prevention and Reporting

▸ BP/AR 5142 - Safety

▸ BP/AR 5145.3 - Nondiscrimination/Harassment

▸ BP/AR 5145.7 - Sexual Harassment

▸ BP 5145.9 - Hate-Motivated Behavior

▸ BP/AR 6142.1 - Sexual Health and HIV/AIDS Prevention Instruction

▸ BP 6159.4 - Behavioral Interventions for Special Education Students

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Alcohol, Tobacco, and Illicit Drugs

by Gus Frias, Ed.D.

IN THIS BRIEF:

▸ Statistics on alcohol, tobacco, and drug use among youth

▸ LEA examples of policies and trainings on Naloxone

▸ LEA examples of community and state partnerships on family and student drug prevention education programs

▸ Sample questions for board members

▸ Relevant guidance and resources

▸ Relevant board policies and administrative regulations

The harmful realities of alcohol, tobacco, and illicit drugs continue to inflict pain and suffering on students and staff across K-12 school communities. In California, all students and staff have a constitutional right to attend schools that are safe, secure, and peaceful.[1] This right includes attending schools that are safe from harmful drugs and their perpetrators.

This brief addresses the substance abuse epidemic, including the rise of deadly fentanyl, and provides best practices in prevention and intervention for local educational agencies (LEAs). Related questions for governance teams to consider are also provided, as well as a list of relevant resources.
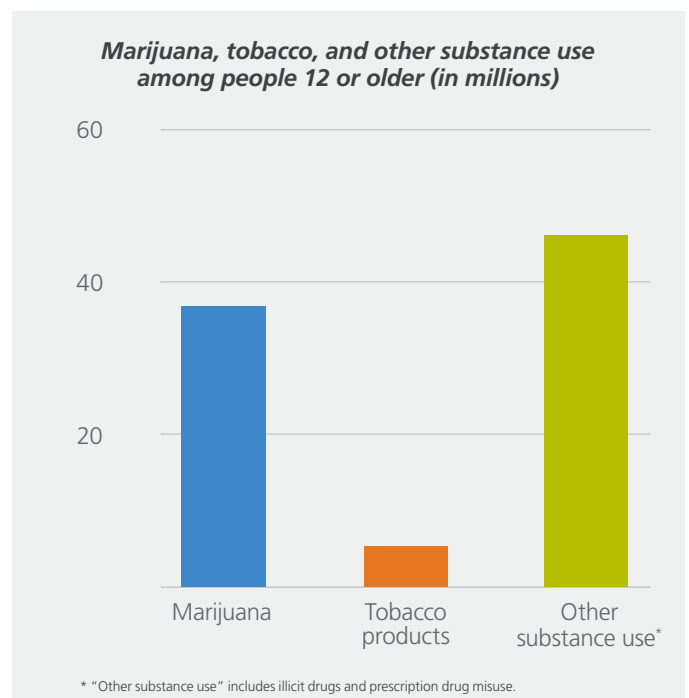
Illicit drugs in schools

The harmful presence of drugs in K-12 schools is impacting students and staff across California. A key indicator of their presence is the California School Staff Survey (CSSS), an anonymous survey on student drug use, reflecting the responses of fifth- to 12th-grade teachers, counselors, and administrators from across the state. According to the CSSS staff data for 2019–21:

▸ 14 percent reported that student alcohol and drug use was a severe problem at their schools.

▸ 9 percent reported that student tobacco use is a severe problem.

▸ 33 percent reported that student vaping is a severe problem.

▸ 92 percent reported that their school districts have policies that ban tobacco use and vaping on school property.

▸ 20 percent disagree that their respective schools enforce these policies consistently and effectively.[2]

Students attending California's secondary schools also confirmed the presence of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs on their campuses. According to the California Healthy Kids Survey for 2019–21:

▸ 3 percent of ninth graders and 7 percent of 11th graders reported binge drinking (five or more drinks).

▸ 12 percent of 11th-grade students reported marijuana use.

▸ 10 percent reported vaping.

▸ About 20 percent of high school students reported having vaped, and they were more likely to have vaped marijuana than a nicotine or tobacco product.[3]

Marijuana, tobacco, and other substance use among people 12 or older (in millions)

* "Other substance use" includes illicit drugs and prescription drug misuse.

The problem

Based on the 2021 National Survey on Drug Use and Health by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration, an estimated 46 million people in the United States ages 12 or older had a substance use disorder in the past year.[4] Of these, more than 100,000 people died from a drug overdose in 2021, an increase of over 15,000 deaths recorded in 2020.[5] The following section provides facts about alcohol, tobacco, and illicit drug use, including marijuana, prescription drugs, and fentanyl.

Alcohol use among 12- to 20-year-olds in the United States (in millions)
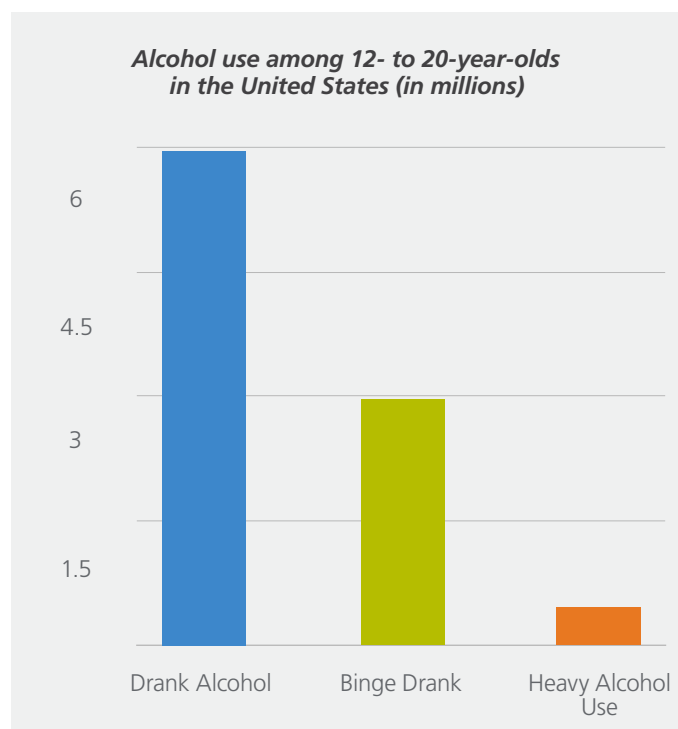
Alcohol use

All 50 states in the U.S. prohibit the possession and use of alcohol by people under the age of 21. However, in 2021, about 6 million adolescents ages 12 to 20 drank alcohol, 3 million binge drank, and 613,000 engaged in heavy alcohol use.[6]

Tobacco use and nicotine vaping

Among high school students, nicotine vaping is a rising phenomenon, increasing tobacco use overall. Although the sale of tobacco products to anyone under the age of 21 is illegal in the U.S., 6.5 million adolescents ages 12-20 used tobacco products, an e-cigarette, or other vaping devices to vape nicotine.[7]

Illicit drug use

In 2021, one in five people ages 12 or older reported using an illicit drug in the past year, higher than in previous years.[8] This illicit drug use was driven primarily by marijuana and prescription drugs.

Marijuana use

Marijuana is a plant that is usually smoked, vaped, or consumed in an edible form, and can be harmful to its users. In the U.S. in 2021, it was the third most used drug after alcohol and tobacco products.[9] In 2021, 36 million people ages 12 and older reported using marijuana in the past month, including 7 million who vaped marijuana.[10]

Negative effects on adolescents using marijuana include:

- Harm to their developing brain
- Difficulty in thinking and problem-solving
- Problems with memory and learning
- Reduced physical coordination
- Difficulty holding attention
- Problems with school and social life

Prescription drug abuse

Prescription pain reliever misuse was the second most common form of illicit drug use in the U.S. in 2021.

- About 9 million people 12 or older misused pain relievers[11]
- Among those who misused pain relievers, the most common reason for their misuse was to relieve physical pain (64 percent)
- About 6 percent of people ages 12 or older who misused prescription pain relievers were misusers of prescription opioid products
- 45 percent of people who misused pain relievers in the past year obtained their last pain reliever from a friend or relative for free[12]

Additionally, one in four adolescents reported abusing stimulant medication to treat attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), such as Adderall or Ritalin. According to research, adolescents who used marijuana were four times more likely to abuse prescription drugs than adolescents who did not use marijuana.[13] Schools were 36 percent more likely to have an abuse of stimulant drug problem on campus if they had a high student population prescribed these stimulant medications.[14]

Opioids and the rise of fentanyl

In October 2017, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services declared a public health emergency to address the rising overdose deaths due to the opioid epidemic.[15] This crisis particularly impacts high school students.

According to a recent survey on youth risk behavior, one in seven high school students reported misusing prescription opioids in their lifetime, and one in 14 reported current prescription opioid misuse.[16] The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) defines opioids as a "class of drug to reduce pain." There are three types of opioids: prescription drugs such as oxycodone, which is prescribed

by a medical professional; heroin, which is an illegal opioid; and fentanyl, which is a synthetic opioid.[17] Opioid misuse includes the misuse of prescription pain relievers or the use of heroin. In 2021, about 9 million people misused prescription pain relievers compared to 1 million people who used heroin.[18]

Fentanyl is a synthetic opioid, currently listed as a prescription drug, that mimics the effects of morphine in the body but is 50 to 100 times more potent than morphine.[19] The high potency and availability of fentanyl has made it the deadliest drug threat impacting schools and communities across the U.S. According to the CDC, from 1999 to 2020, over half a million people died from opioid overdoses.[20]

In 2020, the number of reported overdose deaths attributed to fentanyl was 68,000, and rose to nearly 81,000 by 2021.[21] Of these latter deaths, roughly 70,000 were attributed to fentanyl mixed with other illicit drugs like cocaine, methamphetamine, and heroin.[22] Many users were unaware that they were taking fentanyl.

Only two milligrams of fentanyl (the size of a grain of sand) are considered a potentially lethal dose. Counterfeit or fake pills laced with fentanyl or heroin are increasing prevalent and a serious cause for concern, especially when an individual thinks they are purchasing a weaker prescription drug like Xanax or Adderall.[23] Counterfeit pills are inexpensive, increasingly available, and can be fatal.[24]

Naloxone is a life-saving medication used to reverse an opioid overdose, including heroin, fentanyl, and prescription opioid medications. Naloxone can be quickly given through nasal spray (Narcan®) in the nose, or through an injectable or auto-injector into the outer thigh or another major muscle. It is safe and easy to use, works almost immediately, and is not addictive, has very few negative effects, and has no effect if opioids are not in a person's system. See the Naloxone for Schools Toolkit in the resources section for more information.

Drug prevention and treatment

Drug prevention activities work to educate and support individuals and communities to prevent the use and misuse of drugs.[25] Substance or drug abuse prevention is a process that attempts to prevent the onset of substance use in order to limit the development of problems associated with using psychoactive substances. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), psychoactive substances are defined as "substances that, when taken in or administered into one's system, affect mental processes, e.g., perception, consciousness, cognition or mood and emotions. Psychoactive drugs belong to a broader category of psychoactive substances that include alcohol and nicotine. 'Psychoactive' does not necessarily imply dependence-producing, and in common parlance, the term is often left unstated, as in 'drug use,' 'substance use' or 'substance abuse.'"[26]

Prevention efforts may focus on the individual or the environment. Evidenced-based prevention programs are more effective than simply telling students to abstain from drugs.[27] Multiple research studies on awareness campaigns and drug abstinence programs have found little to no reduction in drug or alcohol use and/or

abuse.[28] Evidence-based or research-based programs are those that have been shown to work, use current scientific evidence, have been thoroughly tested, and show positive data.[29] See the Resource section for examples of evidenced-based programs.

Starting drug prevention programs early, as early as kindergarten, and repeating information and practicing skills annually helps empower students to feel knowledgeable about what to do when encountering drugs.[30]

For more information on prevention supports for LEAs, see the Resources section.

According to research, the first line of treatment for addiction to opioids (prescription or illicit drugs) should be medication combined with either behavioral therapy or counseling.[31] Medications are also available to help treat addiction to alcohol and cocaine. Examples of services a program provides might include school, peer, or family counseling; drug-free zones; and health care. This is best exemplified by the Public Health and the Web of Influence models.

The public health model

The public health model stresses interactions among an agent (alcohol, tobacco, or a drug); a host (a user); and the environment (the social, cultural, and physical context in which the use occurs).[32] To ensure the public's health, this model requires prevention efforts to address all three domains and focuses on changing the environment to change the user's beliefs and attitudes toward using harmful substances.[33]

The Web of Influence Theory

The Web of Influence Theory identifies risk and protective factors for three main domains — the individual, the family, and the environment — and how they interact to minimize drug use and maximize healthy behaviors.[34] Examples of risk factors impacting drug use among youth include:

Domains	Risk Factors
Individual level	Anti-social behavior, aggression, drug use by peers, and the perception that drug use is harmless
Family level	Parents/guardians engage in and encourage others to use drugs, family engages in conflict, poor parent/guardian and child relationship
Environmental level	High school absenteeism, low substance abuse policy enforcement, widespread availability of drugs, attractive marketing of drugs to youth, and use of social media to spread drug use among youth

Risk factors and protective factors vary among individuals. Protective factors can mitigate the risk of trying and using illicit drugs. Examples of protective factors to prevent drug use among youth include the following:

Domains	Protective Factors
Individual level	▸ Self-efficacy to say "no" to drugs ▸ Socialization with individuals who do not use illicit drugs ▸ Youth involvement in sports or other positive physical activities ▸ Belief in one's ability to control what happens and adapt to change
Family level	▸ Unity, warmth, and attachment between parents and children ▸ Parent and guardian supervision and monitoring of children's behavior ▸ Parent and guardian rules against drug use ▸ Parents and guardians lead children by example, while staying drug-free
Environmental level	▸ Positive emotional support outside of the family ▸ Peer disapproval of drug use ▸ School belonging, involvement, and achievement ▸ School and community norms and standards against drug use

Drug intervention strategies

Like drug prevention, effective drug intervention must be culturally appropriate, family-supported, individualized, coordinated, and monitored. Intervention is specifically effective when it is designed and implemented consistently over time with input from the student, the family, and appropriate professionals.[35] The best-known, research-based drug intervention strategies that have proven to be effective at K-12 schools are those associated with Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS).

Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports

PBIS is an evidence-based, three-tiered framework for supporting students' behavioral, academic, social, emotional, and mental health.[36] PBIS emphasizes five inter-related elements: equity, systems, data, practices, and outcomes.

Tiers	Supports
Tier 1	Uses systems, data, and practices to support everyone — students, educators, and staff across all school settings
Tier 2	Provides supports that address the needs of identified at-risk students
Tier 3	Provides intensive, individualized supports to students that need it

According to research and evaluation of these practices, when implemented with fidelity, PBIS improves social-emotional competence, academic success, and helps ensure safe and drug-free learning environments where all students can thrive.

Foundational systems across all three tiers of PBIS include:

▸ A shared vision for a positive school social culture

▸ A representative leadership team that meets regularly and shares expertise in addressing social, emotional, behavioral, health, wellness, and academic issues

▸ Actively engaged families

▸ A supportive and involved school administration

▸ Ongoing access to professional development for preparing all staff to implement each tier of PBIS

▸ A systematic collection of screening, progress, outcome, and fidelity data

▸ Ongoing use of data for decision making

▸ An examination of equity among student subgroups by disaggregating data

Student discipline

When addressing the discipline of students involved in substance abuse at school, educators need to be clear on the applicable board policies and administrative regulations. Training can be provided on related anti-drug school rules, board policies, and understanding the California laws applicable to the respective violations.

In 2021, the California Department of Education (CDE) shared its State Guidance for New Laws on Discipline. This guidance:

▸ Ended suspensions for willful defiance in K-8

▸ Required homework for students suspended for two or more days

▸ Minimized suspension for attendance issues

▸ Encouraged alternatives to suspension that help students improve behavioral and academic outcomes

The guidance supports the use of restorative practices, trauma-informed practices, social and emotional learning, and schoolwide PBIS. These practices can help students gain critical social and emotional skills, understand the impact of their actions, and develop meaningful methods for repairing harm to the school community. The CDE guidance also provides a list of resources for educators.

Senate Bill 10—Opioid overdose prevention and treatment: Melanie's Law

California's Senate Bill 10 states the Legislature's encouragement of county offices of education to establish a County Working Group on Fentanyl Education in Schools, as provided, for the purposes of outreach, building awareness, and collaborating with local health agencies regarding fentanyl overdoses. The bill requires the state Department of Education to curate and maintain on its website, among other things, informational materials containing awareness and safety advice for school staff, pupils, and parents or guardians of pupils on how to prevent an opioid overdose. Additionally, it requires, "a comprehensive school safety plan, and the school safety plan of a charter school, for a school serving pupils in any of grades 7 to 12, inclusive, to include the development of a protocol in the event a pupil is suffering or is reasonably believed to be suffering from an opioid overdose." Bill Text – SB10 Pupil health: opioid overdose prevention and treatment: Melanie's Law. (ca.gov)

Questions for governance teams to consider

The following questions are meant to guide governance teams when discussing and reviewing the LEA's policies on alcohol, tobacco, and illicit drugs.

1) What students' rights should be kept in mind when developing, reviewing, and revising our LEA's policies on alcohol and/or illicit drug use?

2) Is there consistent enforcement of the LEA's policies and consistent discipline practices and procedures for students engaging with or under the influence of alcohol and/or illicit drugs? Are the consequences clearly stated?

3) What drug prevention measures are the LEA using, and are they effective? What data do we need to assess the measures of success? What supports might better assist the effectiveness of existing prevention measures?

4) Has our community been informed of our alcohol and illicit drug policies and prevention measures? Have we engaged with our community members and educational partners to enhance our prevention efforts or communicate our policies?

5) What resources can we identify to share with families and students about prevention and intervention strategies? Are we providing timely education to families about what to look for in terms of drug and alcohol use?

6) What considerations should our LEA address in its code of conduct provisions concerning student involvement with alcohol and/or illicit drugs? Are there treatment resources for students? Are they communicated broadly and regularly?

7) What data do we need to review to evaluate the safety in our LEA regarding on-site drug/alcohol/nicotine use? Is there drug/alcohol/nicotine use on our buses, at our sporting events, or at off-site educational outings?

Relevant resources

California School Boards Association

All students and staff need a safe and supportive school environment in order to succeed. The most effective approach to creating safe and supportive school environments requires a comprehensive, coordinated effort including schoolwide, districtwide, and communitywide strategies. Find more resources and information at https://csba.pub/3wRew6l.

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)

The mission of SAMHSA is to improve behavioral health through evidence-based prevention approaches. SAMHSA is committed to improving prevention, treatment, and recovery support services for mental and substance use disorders. The Evidence-Based Practices Resource Center provides communities, clinicians, policymakers, and others with the information and tools to incorporate evidence-based practices into their communities or clinical settings. https://csba.pub/3TyxBD8

A Guide to SAMHSA's Strategic Prevention Framework (SPF)

This toolkit provides an introduction to the SPF's extensively-tested and user-friendly planning approach. Organized by each of the steps in the framework, the toolkit provides a snapshot of how each of the components fit together and build on one another. Adherence to the principles in the framework increases the likelihood that prevention efforts will produce anticipated outcomes, reduce harmful behaviors, and keep communities healthy and safe. https://csba.pub/49P6Wrq

Tobacco Use and Prevention Education (TUPE)

The TUPE program provides funding from Prop 99 and Prop 56 tobacco tax dollars for tobacco prevention education. For school districts to receive funding, they must submit a competitive grant application to the CDE. Competitive grants are available for LEAs serving grades 6-8 or grades 9-12. The funds are to be used to deliver a comprehensive tobacco prevention program that includes tobacco-specific student instruction; supplemental strategies that include reinforcement activities and schoolwide events; and cessation for high school students. https://csba.pub/3v1VMAJ

Reducing Vaping Among Youth and Young Adults guide

This guide supports health care providers, systems, and communities seeking to prevent vaping. It describes relevant research findings, examines emerging and best practices, identifies knowledge gaps and implementation challenges, and offers useful resources. https://csba.pub/3IyKM0N

Naloxone for Schools Toolkit

The Naloxone for Schools Toolkit is a set of protocols and resources detailing how to train staff to obtain and administer Naloxone. For more information, see the Toolkit Sample from the San Mateo County Office of Education, and the San Mateo Coalition for Safe Schools and Communities at https://csba.pub/3IDReUc.

The California Department of Health Care Services (DHCS)

DHCS provides Naloxone for free to qualified organizations — including K-12 schools — to distribute naloxone within communities. Learn more by visiting the Naloxone Distribution Project. https://csba.pub/43kulyp

Department of Justice | Drug Enforcement Administration

Many fake pills are made to look like prescription opioids — such as oxycodone (Oxycontin®, Percocet®), hydrocodone (Vicodin®), and alprazolam (Xanax®); or stimulants like amphetamines (Adderall®) — but contain fentanyl or methamphetamine. https://csba.pub/4abnTMp

The California Healthy Kids Resource Center

This center provides assistance to school districts and county offices of education as a source of comprehensive information about health-related research and instructional materials to support effective programs for students. Materials from the center can be borrowed at no cost. The CHKRC identifies programs for dissemination and adoption by local educational agencies and maintains a database on programs available in California. https://csba.pub/43erZ4p

Safety First: Real Drug Education for Teens

Drug Policy Alliance (DPA) developed and distributed Safety First: Real Drug Education for Teens. It is the nation's first harm reduction-based drug education curriculum for high school students. The curriculum emerged from DPA's long-running Safety First program aimed at providing resources for parents. https://csba.pub/3IDaWzu

Substance Use/Misuse Warning Signs

Many youth may show behaviors in adolescence that are indicative of substance abuse but can also be considered normal behaviors while growing up. It is important to take notice if there are several signs happening at the same time, if they occur suddenly, and if the behaviors are extreme. https://csba.pub/3TlnrV8

California Department of Public Health

The Overdose Prevention Initiative (OPI) works on the complex and changing nature of the drug overdose epidemic through prevention and research activities. OPI collects and shares data on fatal and non-fatal drug-related overdoses, drug-related overdose risk factors, prescriptions, and substance use. Through state and local partnerships, OPI supports substance use prevention programs, harm reduction tools and strategies, public awareness and education, and safe and effective prescribing and treatment practices. https://csba.pub/3TAubjf

Relevant CSBA board policies and administrative regulations

CSBA GAMUT Policy and Policy *Plus* subscribers have access to sample policies. The following sample policies and administrative regulations are relevant to alcohol, tobacco, and illicit drugs.

▸ BP 3513.4 - Drug and Alcohol-Free Schools

▸ BP/AR 5131.6 - Alcohol and Other Drugs

▸ BP 5131.61 - Drug Testing

▸ BP/AR 5141.21 - Administering Medication and Monitoring Health Conditions

▸ BP/AR 5144 - Discipline

▸ BP/AR 5144.1 - Suspension and Expulsion/Due Process

▸ AR 5144.2 - Suspension and Expulsion/Due Process (Students with Disabilities)

▸ BP/AR 6142.8 - Comprehensive Health Education

▸ BP/AR 6143 - Courses of Study

▸ BP 6164.2 - Guidance/Counseling Services

Dr. Gus Frias is education sector chief for InfraGard Los Angeles, which is a crime and violence prevention partnership between the FBI and the private sector. Previously, he also worked as manager of School Safety Programs for Los Angeles County Office of Education, where he assisted in developing exemplary school safety programs and practices. Frias earned advanced degrees in educational leadership from the University of Southern California and the Harvard Graduate School of Education.

Endnotes

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Crisis Communications and School Safety

by Trinette Marquis with contributions from John Czajkowski

IN THIS BRIEF:

▸ Definitions of emergency terminology

▸ The role of the public information officer

▸ Crisis communications planning best practices

▸ Sample questions for board members

▸ Relevant guidance and resources

▸ Relevant board policies and administrative regulations

Key terms and definitions:

▸ **Emergency Operations Center:** An Emergency Operations Center, or EOC, is a central command and control facility responsible for carrying out emergency management and ensuring continuity during an emergency/disaster. The EOC is responsible for the strategic overview and coordination of the emergency/disaster.

▸ **Remote reunification purpose and process:** During an emergency, normal school dismissal may not be possible. A remote reunification process is part of a school emergency operations plan (EOP) that details actions to take before, during, and after an emergency to ensure students are reunited with their families.

▸ **Redundant and secure centralized communications:** Redundant communications refers to having multiple back-up means of communication and is critical in emergency preparedness planning. It is not recommended to depend on just one or two means of communication.

When, not if: Planning for crisis response

Unfortunately, every board member should think about the topic of crisis communication. It is not a matter of *if* a local educational agency (LEA) will find itself in the middle of a crisis; it is a matter of *when* and *how well prepared it is to face it*. The following section covers strategies that can help guide governance teams and LEAs before, during, and after a crisis.

Before a crisis – Preparation is key

The secret of successfully handling a crisis is in the preparation. Creating strong relationships, setting high expectations for transparency, and putting effective plans in place are three ways that can help an LEA be prepared for a coming crisis.

Building a foundation of trust: Creating strong relationships

While it may not seem like the first step in preparing for a crisis, consistent and proactive community engagement is a key step in effective crisis response for LEAs. When LEA leaders are engaged in the local community, they become the face of the LEA, develop individual relationships with community members, and increase trust in the leadership team and organization as a whole.

Trust acts as a social currency. Deposits are made with each positive interaction at a meeting, event, or over email or text. Withdrawals happen when an organization falls short of expectations, such as with the bad behavior of an employee, poor response to a crisis situation, or lack of communication in general.

It is fundamental to build trust *before* a crisis hits. In most communities, there are a number of organizations that would welcome an LEA representative at various events, meetings, or other gatherings. For example, business groups, community organizations, social clubs

and service clubs that serve your community, and most of these groups have regular meetings, social gatherings, or fundraising events that provide a great opportunity for connection. However, consistent participation in all of these groups may be challenging for just one or two leaders, LEAs may recognize participation as part of the job for administrators throughout the organization and allow time for that important work.

In addition to filling the "trust account" before a crisis to ensure support, connecting with business groups and community organizations can bring valuable opportunities to LEAs in the form of community assets that students and schools can use and additional resources before, during, and after a crisis.

Setting a transparent tone starts at the top

Another important foundation for dealing with a crisis is to create a culture of transparency throughout the organization. For governance teams, this primarily relates to how they communicate with their community before, during, and after decisions both large and small.

Setting an expectation of transparency starts at the top. Board meetings should be easy to attend, processes during the meeting should be explained, and decisions should be communicated widely. When talking about issues at board meetings, trustees should demonstrate that they are open-minded about the topic and curious about the testimony and supporting materials provided. They can also demonstrate transparency by being prepared prior to meetings, ensuring that the LEA follows open meeting laws and requirements, and providing thoughtful comments, questions, and suggestions. Board members can also create transparency by being responsive outside of board meetings, by listening, responding to emails (as appropriate), and engaging with community members at community events. This type of transparency increases trust in organizational leaders and the likelihood that the LEA will successfully navigate a future crisis with the support of LEA staff and the community.

Developing a crisis communication plan

While trust is being built through relationships and transparency, LEAs should be working toward a consistent crisis communication plan that defines the various levels of crisis, key staff roles in communicating about a crisis, and necessary communication procedures. The plan should define when actions must be taken, designate spokespeople for different incidents, specify when educational partners should be contacted, and include parameters for crisis messaging for the most probable incidents.

Once the crisis communication plan has been developed, share the plan widely and train key personnel so that they are comfortable taking the steps outlined in the plan when a crisis strikes.

Role of the public information officer or director of communications

Ideally, LEAs will have an in-house public information officer (PIO) or someone responsible for communication efforts that can assist in planning and training as well as step up when a crisis hits. The PIO is one of the few generalists in an LEA, working on a wide variety of issues and with each school and department in the organization. They can assist leaders with understanding not only how internal departments might be impacted, but also how choices are likely to be interpreted by various audience groups.

Professionals with communications backgrounds also have the ability to break down complicated concepts and nuanced issues so that they are understandable. This skill set can help enormously when the crisis is confusing or unfolding in a way that is hard to predict.

One of the most important ways the PIO can assist is by their efforts before and after a crisis. In their role, they are more likely to develop trusting relationships with communications professionals in other organizations like local law enforcement and fire, as well as with area community leaders.

LEAs without the resources to hire a communications professional can still fill this important function by providing crisis communication training to leaders and administrative assistants. There are county, state, and national organizations that regularly provide this type of training and coaching assistance. Another option for LEAs is to hire an outside communication consultant. While they will likely not have local relationships, they will be able to assist in the strategic analysis of the crisis situation and develop key messages for LEA staff to communicate to the public. It is important to ensure that an outside consultant is a good fit for the LEA. For example, do they come recommended from another LEA? Have they worked with similar issues or LEAs before? Are they accredited in public relations (the highest standard in the industry)? Even when a consultant is hired, it is important that the LEA be the face in a crisis situation.

Developing a community alert template

As part of the crisis communication plan, LEAs should prepare for how they will alert the community when a security incident occurs. It is recommended that LEAs have a template webpage prepared in advance that directs inquiries to desired Emergency Operations Center (EOC) numbers and locations and clarifies the LEA-supported remote reunification purpose and process. The LEA's webpage

should also emphasize that parents and guardians should refrain from approaching the incident location. In the event of a significant incident, a natural disaster, or safety emergency, it is possible that nearby LEA (and overlapping district) schools will be placed into a secure campus protocol or even lockdown. The communication plan must prepare for this possibility and follow up on information as needed in a process that is coordinated with all relevant partners and streamed across available media platforms.

Plan for centralized and redundant means of communication

A more technical aspect of developing a crisis communication plan includes attention to logistical details for communications systems such as radios, cell phones, and other alternatives, known as redundant and secure centralized communications. When LEAs have redundant and secure centralized communications that will continue to function during a crisis, it allows LEA and first responders to maintain contact when timely responses are critical. In crisis situations, local cell towers can commonly become overloaded due to higher-than-normal use. To plan for this possibility, some LEAs have implemented LEA-wide, encrypted, Federal Communications Commission (FCC)-licensed radio systems that are used in everyday operations but have deeper features that can be employed during an emergency. Some LEAs also share these radio systems with local law enforcement. Print materials are a secondary means of communication when email systems and connectivity are compromised.

During a crisis: Putting the plan into action

It is even more important to be disciplined about effective communication in the midst of a crisis. When a crisis begins to emerge, it is time to turn to the crisis communication plan. Bringing together key personnel and reviewing the plan is one of the first steps to ensure that everyone is on the same page about how to respond to the situation. Key personnel, including governance team members, should be regularly informed about updates to the plan. Board members should work with LEA staff to regularly review the crisis communication plan to make sure it contains the most up-to-date information and ensure that scenarios, roles, and procedures are still applicable.

During a crisis, there will be enormous pressure to communicate the details of the event. It is critical that LEA leaders remain open-minded until details are confirmed. Most crises unfold over time, and, during the initial period, a lot of information will come in from a variety of sources. Being cautious and confirming details for accuracy will ensure that leaders make the best choices and communicate effectively. If asked to comment on an emerging crisis, avoid making assumptions or predictions about what has or what will happen. It is important to follow the roles and responsibilities as outlined in the crisis communication plan.

Consistent messaging will limit the opportunity for rumors and ensure that everyone with a role in responding to the crisis is informed. Clear and consistent messaging with updates as available

will help mitigate misinformation from circulating. Aim to keep updates free from acronyms or technical terms that may cause confusion. Use preplanned or scripted messages to stop the spread of misinformation.

Managing information during a crisis

It is a common emergency management practice for law enforcement leadership to hold hourly press briefings for all incident updates. While hourly press briefings are likely not necessary and may not be possible for every crisis, regular press briefings can help direct the flow of community inquiries and remind staff and administration to control the exchange of information in accordance with their local partners. Failing to do so can cause a major erosion of trust and reputational damage to an LEA. It is highly recommended that all staff be trained regarding the dangers posed by releasing information that is premature, inaccurate, and/or unauthorized. Leaders should also be aware of any confidentiality requirements that apply to the particular circumstances of the incident when briefing the press or otherwise providing comment, including student and personnel record information. There will certainly be enough stress and ambiguity present for the entire LEA community, so the LEA's communications strategy and plan should attempt to mitigate these factors to the greatest extent possible.

Prioritize providing accurate information in a crisis

When communicating in a crisis, it is important to provide responsive, consistent, and accurate information. Informational expectations have increased dramatically over the years in conjunction with the adoption of communication platforms that make instant information distribution possible. As mentioned earlier, there will be tremendous pressure to provide information quickly, but it is critical to ensure accuracy as well.

Acquiring and providing accurate information takes time. However, leaders can still communicate to acknowledge the situation and let families and staff know that they are working towards understanding and resolving the crisis. In fact, even when there is no new information, it can still be helpful to share when updates can be expected. Once the promise of an update is made, it is critical that it is kept, even if just to say that leaders are still working on resolving the crisis.

When an LEA has some culpability in a crisis, it is human nature to want to withdraw from public engagement. However, a gap in communication is likely to be filled by others. With the increase in social media platforms, podcasts, and blogging, anyone with an opinion about the situation will have the opportunity to share it with others. If the LEA is not providing ongoing communication of accurate information, the narrative of the crisis will begin to form with other input, and it may not be a positive narrative for the LEA. Many will decide that the lack of communication means that leaders do not care, are incompetent, or worse. Even if it is not possible to provide new information, continue to reach out to

let people know that leaders are still engaged in the situation and are working towards finding a solution or ensuring the safety of the community. For more information about using social media platforms and navigating misinformation see the "School Safety Communications Planning Guide" in the Relevant resources section at the end of this brief.

Know the three keys of messaging

When communicating in a crisis, it is important to make sure LEA messaging contains the most accurate information possible. What should the message contain? It depends on the situation, but a general formula includes three elements:

1) What does the LEA know about what happened?

2) What is the LEA doing?

3) What does the LEA want the recipient to do?

For example, a message about a bomb threat to a campus might mention when the threat was reported, the evacuation process that was followed, and where families can pick up evacuated students. Most importantly, people will want to know that students are safe.

In addition to providing the correct information, consider the tone of the message. Messages should be student-centered and demonstrate that leaders are concerned about the situation. Language should be simple. The LEA should refrain from using jargon and take into consideration the various reading levels of the audience. Messages should also be reviewed by the LEA's legal team as necessary and, where possible, translated into the languages used by families at the school or LEA.

Once the message is ready to go out, it should be sent across multiple platforms to ensure it is received and then posted in one central place for everyone to access the latest information as well as create a record of what has transpired. When messages are only posted on social media, for example, people may see messages out of order, which can cause additional confusion.

Coordination with community partners

While in most situations board members should be focused on policy matters, they may wish to assist staff onsite when a crisis occurs. This might simply consist of offering to show up at a campus or office to provide a calming presence and an extra pair of hands. Board members with trusted community connections can also offer to help access any community resources needed to support students and staff.

Ideally, LEA leaders have made solid connections with local community groups, law enforcement, and first responder agencies. During a crisis, keep the lines of communication open with these groups, as they may be working on the same crisis from a different perspective and can offer support. In addition, when agencies are able to collaborate on key messages related to a crisis and provide unified communication, it helps ease community concerns

and anxiety about the crisis response. For example, if the crisis is related to police activity, it can be reassuring for area families to receive joint messaging from the LEA and police department and know that they are working closely together.

After a crisis

After the LEA has gone through a crisis, it is natural to want to move on to normalcy as quickly as possible. Many crises are emotionally draining, and it can be challenging to revisit the event timeline. However, it is critical to take this reflective step because that is how an LEA can ensure ongoing improvement.

Ensure accountability with a focus on solutions

No matter how well an LEA handles a crisis, there is usually at least one area that could have been handled better. Approaching a post-incident debrief with the right focus is the key to discovering new and better ways of doing things. Reviewing the timeline of events with a focus on solutions rather than blame will make participants feel less defensive and facilitate more ideas.

Sharing next steps

As the crisis comes to a close, share any lessons learned to demonstrate that the LEA is committed to continuous improvement. There may be a need for a new process, investment, training, or additional or different communication to ensure student and staff safety going forward. Demonstrating transparency in sharing these lessons can help to repair or increase trust levels after a crisis.

It is not a matter of if LEAs will experience a crisis; it is a matter of when and how well prepared they are to face it. Understanding the steps that can be taken before, during, and after a crisis will help leaders and employees throughout the LEA to feel more confident when that crisis hits.

Questions for governance teams to consider

Before, during, and after a crisis, board members can assist in finding the best path forward by asking reflective questions.

To prepare for crisis communication around school safety incidents:

1) What is the LEA's existing crisis communication plan? Who has access to it, and when was it last reviewed?

2) Who are the key staff responsible for implementing the crisis communication plan?

3) Who will speak on behalf of the LEA during a crisis?

4) How (and when) will staff communicate with partner organizations during a crisis?

General communication questions to consider during a crisis include:

1) Is this information accurate?

2) Has the LEA already communicated this information?

3) How does the LEA ensure that everyone (students, families, staff) has access to communication?

4) What do students, families, and staff need right now?

5) How can board members, community members, or partner organizations be helpful?

Following a crisis, some questions about communication practices include:

1) What about the communication strategy worked well?

2) Were there internal gaps in communication or gaps in communication with partner organizations and families?

3) What are the lessons learned from this incident? Include them in an updated crisis communication plan.

Relevant resources

California School Public Relations Association (CalSPRA)

This statewide association serves anyone who works in a communication capacity in an educational environment and provides professional development, sample templates, and valuable connections to other California communicators. www.calspra.org

National School Public Relations Association

This national organization serves school public relations professionals throughout the country and provides online monthly and in-person annual professional development. www.nspra.org

The National Center for School Safety (NCSS)

NCSS is a Bureau of Justice Assistance-funded training and technical assistance center at the University of Michigan School of Public Health. As a multidisciplinary, multi-institutional center focused on improving school safety and preventing school violence, the NCSS team is composed of national leaders in criminal justice, education, social work, and public health with expertise in school safety research and practice. NCSS provides comprehensive and accessible support to Students, Teachers, and Officers Preventing (STOP) School Violence grantees and the school safety community nationwide to address today's school safety challenges. NCSS serves as the national training and technical assistance provider for the STOP School Violence Program. https://bit.ly/3v7h5Rl

Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools (REMS)

Emergency management planning is very important. Maximizing the strength of an education agency's plans for family reunification is an important part of the work that emergency management teams do at the K-12 level. https://bit.ly/3PlME0J

Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools (REMS)

Collaborating With the Media: Establishing Strategic Partnerships for Emergency Operations Plans Fact Sheet. https://bit.ly/3TANNUE

Relevant CSBA board policies and administrative regulations

CSBA GAMUT Policy and Policy *Plus* subscribers have access to CSBA sample policies and administrative regulations. The following are relevant to communication and safety.

▸ BP 0450 - Comprehensive Safety Plan

▸ BP 1100 - Communication with the Public

▸ BP 1112 - Media Relations

▸ BP 1250/AR 1250 - Visitors/Outsiders

▸ BP 3515/AR 3515 - Campus Security

▸ BP 3515.2/AR 3515.2 - Disruptions

▸ BP 3516 - Emergencies and Disaster Preparedness Plan

▸ BP 5020/AR 5020 - Parents Rights and Responsibilities

▸ BP 5112.5 - Open/Closed Campus

▸ BP 5131.8 - Mobile Communication Devices

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Policy Recommendations
from the *Safe Schools Toolkit*

Increase Mental Health Supports and Services:

▶ Continue continuity of care through collaborative relationships with LEAs and county health departments by providing expanded services to students through school-based health clinics, wellness programs, relevant partner organizations, and other programs allowed through Medicare and MediCal.

▶ Provide additional funding in order to ensure appropriate school counselors, social workers, psychologists, and school nurses are available to address the physical and social-emotional well-being of students.

▶ Increase access to student mental health services developing awareness of resources to reduce the stigma of reaching out for services.

▶ Fund professional learning on mental health for educators, staff, and administrators to identify and support students in distress or crisis.

Invest in Digital Literacy, Privacy, and Protection:

▶ Implement robust data privacy measures to safeguard sensitive information collected through security systems and reporting mechanisms.

  ▶ Reauthorization or expansion of data privacy and protection must to include expansion of the age of consent for collecting personal information without prior consent,

  ▶ Prohibit targeted marketing directly to children under 13,

  ▶ Create a mechanism that allows parent and minors to erase personal information of children or teens, and

  ▶ Focus on safety through a duty of care and parental tools