csba

Safe Schools Toolkit

Strategies for governance teams to support students and staff

Fourth Edition, 2024

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.

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. Align polices to LEA's vision and mission. Determine what, if any, policies should be developed or revised to be consistent with the vision and mission. Ensure community input is meaningfully considered in setting local safety policies.	Adopt policies relating to safety curriculum and professional learning to foster safe and supportive school environments. Select a policy committee and implement an ongoing policy review plan. Approve plan for the dissemination of policies. Ensure new or updated policies are communicated clearly and staff have support to implement the policies. Annually review the protocol for updating CSSPs. Review staffing plan for positions that foster safe and supportive school environments.	Operate within board bylaws and policies. Receive input on professional learning needs. Review and approve funding for resources and materials needed to support safe and supportive school environments. 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.	Perform superintendent evaluation. Conduct regular board self-evaluation. Review staff progress reports and data on safety programs and policy implementation. Conduct formal or informal policy audits. Review CSBA policy updates (4x/year). Serve as the judicial and appeals body for suspensions and expulsions. Following significant safety incidents (including credible threats and hoaxes), ensure the administration has reviewed actions taken and areas for improved response for future concerns.	Engage the community by communicating the value of safe schools to students, families, and others. Seek opportunities to influence legislative and regulatory bodies. 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. Establish policies that support family education. Promote transparency. Review and ensure information online is updated regularly. 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.

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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.

2   See Endnote 1.

3   DePaoli, J., & McCombs, J. (2023). Safe schools, thriving students: Evidence-based strategies for creating safe and supportive schools. Learning Policy Institute. Retrieved from https://bit.ly/4acmwNB.

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.

5   See Endnote 4.

6   WestEd for the California Department of Education (n.d.). California School Climate, Health, and Learning Surveys. CalSCHLS. Retrieved July 31, 2023, from https://bit.ly/4cgly4U.

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.

10   See Endnote 3.

11   See Endnote 3.

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