



POLICY LEVERS TO IMPROVE School Safety

School safety remains a priority for state policymakers nationwide. State leaders have convened task forces, hosted listening sessions and called upon experts in efforts to identify policy levers to improve school safety. Research on effective ways to prevent school violence is limited — it's difficult to establish why something *didn't* happen — so states are pursuing multi-faceted approaches to the issue.



SAFETY PLANS


States have implemented safety planning requirements in statute and/or regulation for schools and districts to promote quick, safe and efficient responses to crises. Safety plans may include detailed procedures that outline the roles for staff, evacuation routes and collaboration with local emergency services. Most states require collaboration with law enforcement in plan development to ensure all parties are prepared for a coordinated response. Some states have aligned their policy with the National Incident Management System.

 **KEY RESOURCE:** [Guide for Developing High-Quality School Emergency Operations Plans](#), Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools Technical Assistance Center



EMERGENCY DRILLS


As a part of crisis response planning, some states require active shooter and lockdown drills in addition to drills for other emergencies such as weather events. These drills can prepare students and staff to respond quickly in crises, test interoperable communication systems and evaluate the efficacy of emergency protocols.

 **KEY RESOURCE:** [Best Practice Considerations for Schools in Active Shooter and Other Armed Assailant Drills](#), National Association of School Psychologists and National Association of School Resource Officers



SECURITY INFRASTRUCTURE

Policymakers have considered enhancing school security infrastructure as a means to deter and impede acts of school violence. Controlled access points, interior locks, interoperable communication systems, alarms and surveillance cameras are some ways states are increasing building security. In considering infrastructure improvements, common challenges include the need to retrofit older school buildings, develop new security standards and balance other infrastructure needs.

 **KEY RESOURCE:** [Safe Schools](#), National Clearinghouse for Educational Facilities



SAFETY AUDITS

In an effort to identify areas of need and to support schools in preventing and responding to emergency situations, some states have instituted school safety audit requirements. School safety audits may consist of a review or inspection of school facilities and security infrastructure, safety procedures and plans, and in some cases, school climate and culture. Safety audit protocols may require the presence of law enforcement to facilitate a coordinated planning process.

 **STATE EXAMPLE:** [Virginia School Safety Audit Program](#), Virginia Center for School and Campus Safety



THREAT ASSESSMENTS

Threat assessments provide a way to quickly and confidentially evaluate a student who might pose a threat to themselves or others. States are requiring threat assessment teams in schools, in conjunction with training provisions, detailed protocols or [model policies](#), and mandated reporting.

 **KEY RESOURCE:** [Enhancing School Safety Using a Threat Assessment Model: An Operational Guide for Preventing Targeted School Violence](#), U.S. Secret Service National Threat Assessment Center



ANONYMOUS REPORTING


States, local education agencies and schools have established confidential threat reporting mechanisms to provide an avenue for students, staff and members of the community to report threats, bullying, suicide risk, relationship violence, and drug and alcohol use, among other concerning behaviors. Initially, some states established 24/7 phone lines, but as technology has evolved, so have reporting options: States now offer mobile apps and websites, in addition to phone lines. These reporting hubs can communicate with local education agencies, schools and even law enforcement when necessary.

 **STATE EXAMPLE:** [Safe2Tell Colorado](#), Colorado Office of the Attorney General



SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICERS

School resource officer is an umbrella term that includes school security and school law enforcement. Most states have regulatory or statutory language that defines SROs and authorizes districts to employ them. Some states also have set parameters for school and law enforcement memoranda of understanding to more clearly define the roles and authority of SROs. Training for SROs can range from traditional law enforcement certification to training that is tailored to their unique role within a school, where they are often expected to serve in multiple capacities as a law enforcement officer, counselor and teacher.

 **KEY RESOURCE:** [To Protect and Educate: The School Resource Officer and the Prevention of Violence in Schools](#), National Association of School Resource Officers



WEAPONS IN SCHOOLS


State laws may explicitly address possession of weapons by school resource officers, school employees and concealed carry permit holders and may allow districts or schools to decide whether to allow weapons in their schools. Laws addressing weapons in schools are often a complicated mix of state education and criminal codes that interact in various ways with federal law.

 **KEY RESOURCE:** [50-State Comparison: Weapons in Schools](#), Education Commission of the States



STATE OFFICES

There are a variety of state-level offices that focus on school safety, though the definitions of school safety and the offices' duties vary broadly. State offices can serve as a compendium of resources; provide oversight, expertise and technical assistance on a wealth of issues; and collaborate across agencies to support schools.

 **KEY RESOURCE:** [States' Roles in Keeping Schools Safe: Opportunities and Challenges for State School Safety Centers and Other Actors](#), National Institute of Justice