



School Safety Policy Landscape

School safety remains a priority for policymakers nationwide. With [13 school shootings in 2019](#) alone, education policy leaders have grappled with a variety of policy options ranging from school safety planning and drills, to increasing the presence of school security and “hardening” school facilities. Although states have explored various preventative efforts, a limited body of research exists to inform policymaking.

School Safety Plans

States have implemented safety planning requirements for schools and school districts in statute and/or regulation to ensure quick, safe and efficient responses to school crises. Safety plans may include detailed procedures that outline the roles for staff, evacuation routes, and collaboration with local emergency services.

According to a [50-State review](#) of state K12 school safety policies, at least 43 states and D.C. require a school safety plan in statute or regulation and at least 29 states and D.C. require law enforcement agencies to be involved in the creation of a school safety plan.

Rhode Island [statute](#) outlines what each plan must address, but delegates plan development to local authorities. In order to support local plan development, [statute](#) tasks the Rhode Island Department of Education, in collaboration with the Rhode Island emergency management agency and other safety officials with the maintenance of a [model policy](#).

Key Resource: [Guide for Developing High-Quality School Emergency Operations Plans](#)

School Safety Drills

Often as a part of planning, some states require active shooter and lockdown drills in addition to drills for

other emergencies such as weather events. Currently, At least 42 states require schools to conduct safety or security drills in state statute or regulation. In 2018, the Maryland legislature enacted [Senate Bill 1265](#), which requires schools to conduct an *age- and developmentally-appropriate* active shooter drill annually. The drill must align with the Department of Homeland Security’s [Active Shooter Preparedness Program](#) or the guidelines established by the [Governor’s Active Assailant Interdisciplinary Work Group](#).

Key Resource: [“Best Practice Considerations for Schools in Active Shooter and Other Armed Assailant Drills”](#)

Security Presence

School Resource Officers (SROs)

SROs are typically commissioned law enforcement officers who are stationed at schools. At least 29 states and D.C. define school resource officers in state statute or regulations, and most of these states require training for SROs that is like that of traditional law enforcement or tailored for the role.

Although [data](#) suggests that almost half of all schools employ a school resource officer, some states are working to bring SROs into more schools. To increase security presence in schools, Maryland [requires](#) the collection of SRO employment data to identify areas of need and provides grant funding to support SRO employment. For districts that are unable to employ an SRO, local law enforcement must provide coverage.

States have also taken steps to ensure SROs are prepared for their unique role within a school where they are often expected to serve as a [law enforcement officer, counselor and teacher](#). For example, California [requires](#) SROs to complete a training course developed



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in consultation with the [Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training](#). Utah requires SROs to attend a [training program](#) approved by the state board of education that may include conflict de-escalation, restorative justice practices, and positive interventions.

Armed School Personnel

At least [nine states](#) explicitly allow non-security school employees to possess weapons in schools, typically only if they meet certain criteria. The [Texas school marshal program](#) allows a school employee appointed by the local board of education to possess a firearm or access one from a secure location on school property. Marshals must complete an 80-hour training program offered by the Texas Commission on Law Enforcement.

Facilities and Safety Audits

A review of research exploring the effectiveness of school facility security measures identified controlled access points/locks, interoperable communication, and reporting technology (see Reporting Tip Lines/ Mobile Applications) as promising strategies for the prevention of school violence. The review also found that the use of surveillance cameras and metal detectors did not have a significant effect on school safety.

[Recent data shows that](#) 94 percent of schools control access to buildings through locked or monitored entrances while under 10 percent of schools utilize metal detectors.

States have approached the challenge of funding school hardening measures (and other school safety measures) in creative ways. Funding mechanisms include:

- Establish designated funds
- Create new revenue sources
- Make legislative appropriations
- Reimburse districts
- Revise the allowable uses of existing funds

Key Resource: "[Paying for School Safety Measures](#)"

In order to identify areas of need and ensure schools are properly equipped, some states have instituted school safety audit/assessment requirements. School safety audits consist of a review of school facilities and security infrastructure. At least 13 states and D.C. require safety audits, while five of these states require law enforcement to be present or participate. Some states require the school or local entity to conduct the audit and submit a report to a state agency, while others require a state agency to conduct the audit. [Virginia](#) mandates the inclusion of five key facets of a school safety audit, including survey components, a review of the crisis management plan, and a facilities inspection.

Threat Assessment

Threat assessments provide a way to quickly and confidentially evaluate a student who might pose a threat to themselves or others. The U.S. Secret Service released an updated [operational guide](#) to support school-specific implementation.

States have increasingly embraced a threat assessment model as a key tool in preventing school violence. In the 2019 legislative session, [Kentucky](#), [Tennessee](#), [Texas](#), and [Washington](#) have all enacted threat assessment legislation, while both [Maryland](#) and [Florida](#) adopted similar provisions in 2018. Virginia schools have been required to establish threat assessment teams since 2013 and the Virginia Center for School and Campus Safety provides [technical assistance and resources](#), including a [model policy](#).

Reporting Tip Lines/ Mobile Applications

States, local education agencies, and schools have established confidential threat reporting mechanisms, such as tip lines and mobile phone applications. [Safe2Tell \(S2T\) Colorado](#) offers multiple options for reporting including a tip line, website and mobile app. [Florida SB 7026](#) (2018) provided for the creation of a mobile reporting app, [FortifyFL](#).