



Final Report

**Missouri Governor's School Safety
Task Force**

July 31, 2019

Lt. Governor Mike Kehoe, Chairman

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Table of Contents

Executive Order	3
Task Force Members & Special Recognition	4
Introduction	5
Task Force Methodology	7
Task Force Findings/Suggestions by Focus Areas	8
A. Effective Communication and Information Sharing	8
B. Mental Health/Behavioral Risk	10
C. School Climate & School Culture	12
D. Emergency Operations Plans	13
E. Physical Security/Technology/Safety Assessments/Audits	15
F. Training & Drills	16
G. SRO/Safety Coordinator Programs	17
H. Access to Grants/Funding Opportunities for School Safety	19
I. Legal - Statutory Constraints on School Safety	20
J. Cybersecurity & Risk	21
K. Other	21
Conclusion	24
Strategic Plan	
Appendixes	
A. School Safety Glossary	
B. Missouri Resources for School Safety	
C. Missouri School Safety Program Background/Overview	
D. Federal Commission Report Synopsis – State and Local Community Recommendations	
E. Federal Commission Report -Federal Resources for School Safety	

EXECUTIVE ORDER
19-04

WHEREAS, school safety is vitally important to the health and well-being of Missouri's students and school personnel; and

WHEREAS, incidents of school violence have become all too common in our country and state leaders, school administrators, and law enforcement agencies continue to seek ways to keep Missouri schools safe; and

WHEREAS, it is critical that the state of Missouri develop comprehensive, coordinated, and effective recommendations for school safety to guide our understanding and prevention of violence in schools; and

WHEREAS, in 2018, President Donald J. Trump established the Federal Commission on School Safety to provide meaningful and actionable recommendations to keep students safe at school; and

WHEREAS, the Commission recently released a report of its findings, which included recommendations based upon policies already working in many states and local communities; and

WHEREAS, there is no single solution to the problem of school violence and there can be no "one size fits all" approach for an issue this complex; and

WHEREAS, a statewide analysis of school safety is needed to evaluate existing best practices in Missouri and to identify potential areas for improvement:

NOW THEREFORE, I, MICHAEL L. PARSON, GOVERNOR OF THE STATE OF MISSOURI, hereby establish the Missouri School Safety Task Force as follows:

1. The Task Force shall include the following members or their designees:
 - a. The Lieutenant Governor, who shall serve as Chair;
 - b. The Director of the Department of Public Safety;
 - c. The Commissioner of the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education;
 - d. The Director of the Department of Mental Health;
 - e. A representative from the Missouri School Boards' Association, selected by the Association;
 - f. A representative from the Center for Education Safety, selected by the Center;
 - g. A school resource officer, appointed by the Governor; and
 - h. Such other members as the Governor may appoint.
2. The Task Force shall study the Federal Commission on School Safety report from Missouri's perspective and shall identify gaps, shortfalls, or suggested policy changes. The Task Force shall also highlight the resources available to communities, school districts, and individual schools to help ensure school safety.
3. The Task Force shall develop and submit a report of its findings and recommendations, which may include a statewide strategic plan, to the Governor by July 31, 2019, at which point the Task Force shall dissolve, unless reauthorized or superseded by a subsequent Executive Order.
4. Members of the Task Force shall not receive any compensation for their duties as members of the Task Force, but may be reimbursed for necessary expenses associated with performing their duties, subject to the availability of funds.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and caused to be affixed the Great Seal of the State of Missouri, in the City of Jefferson, on this 13th day of March, 2019.





Michael L. Parson
Governor

ATTEST:



John R. Ashcroft
Secretary of State

Task Force Members

- Lieutenant Governor Mike Kehoe, Chair
- Director Sandra Karsten, Vice-Chair, Department of Public Safety
- Commissioner of Education Marjorie Vandeven
- Director Mark Stringer, Department of Mental Health
- Senator Jeanie Riddle
- Representative Jerome Barnes
- Melissa Randol, Missouri School Boards' Association
- Captain Kevin Woodson, Cole County Sheriff's Department
- Paul Fennewald, Missouri Center for Education Safety

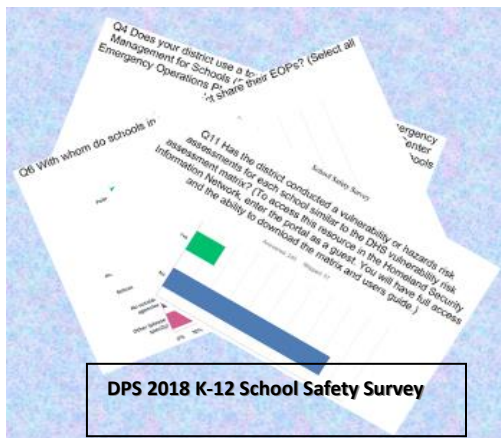
The following individuals provided additional administrative support:

- Adam Gresham, Office of Lt. Governor Mike Kehoe
- Craig Rector, Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
- Amy Roderick, Special Liaison to the Department of Public Safety
- Gerry Lee, Missouri Center for Education Safety
- Debra Walker, Department of Mental Health
- Missouri School Boards' Association staff who provided video recording, public outreach, and website development support

Special Recognition of the following venues supporting the Public Outreach Sessions:

- Kirksville Public School District
- Chaminade High School – St. Louis
- Springfield Public School District
- Mid-America Regional Council of Governments – KC
- Poplar Bluff Chamber of Commerce
- State of Missouri – Truman State Office Building
- Student Outreach – MSBA's Leadership Summit – St. Charles

Introduction



In November, 2018, Missouri surveyed K-12 public and charter schools on the topic of school safety. The survey, completed by more than half of the public school districts in Missouri, established a baseline relating to school safety. This survey, and other input from multiple school safety stakeholders, served as the catalyst for the Missouri School Safety Task Force. While Missouri schools are generally safe overall, the 2018 survey reveals that there is also room for improvement in several areas.

The Task Force conducted six public outreach sessions across the state and received additional input via stakeholder-generated surveys, website comments, a targeted student input session, and through other input received by individual members of the Task Force. The Task Force also reviewed the White House Federal Commission on School Safety Final Report as well as multiple other reports on school safety from other states. These reports were a wealth of knowledge, extremely detailed, and quite lengthy. The Task Force chose to align this report's areas of focus on the Federal Commission Report, where possible.

Some common themes in these reports are:

- *“Duty to Protect”* is a basic state and local obligation. The concept is dynamic as new standards are developed and accepted relative to prevention, mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery efforts in the realm of school safety. The bottom line is that government and districts have a responsibility to take reasonable steps to ensure student safety.
- *“People over Products!”* Relationships and other human factors were recognized as critical to school safety. No technology will eliminate the need for human decision making and common sense.
- *“Woven Layers of Protection”* – Prevention efforts must be comprehensive, connected, and seamless; all supporting a common goal of school safety. Communication and information sharing must be ubiquitous.
- *“School violence is not the only risk.”* Current media attention should not drive school safety efforts. The greatest risk to our children in a school environment is almost always from weather.
- *“One size does not fit all for school safety.”* Missouri schools are each unique. What works very well in an urban or affluent school to promote school safety may not be possible in a rural or economically challenged school.

- *“The federal government, state, and local community school safety focus should be on all schools, and not just K-12 public schools.”* The Task Force’s focus was rightly on all K-12 schools in Missouri, including charter, private, and parochial schools.
- *“Best solutions to address school safety are at the local community and individual school level.”* School safety issues are local issues, and the solution to addressing them is most often at the local community level.
- *“Prevention is preferred over preparedness, response, recovery, and mitigation efforts”.* While it is challenging, preventing problems before they occur is much preferred to responding after the fact.

Task Force Methodology

- **Establish and define Task Force focus areas**
- **Solicit public input via public outreach sessions and via website**
- **Receive and review public input**
- **Research best practices via federal and state reports**
- **Receive targeted input from stakeholders and subject matter experts**
- **Assess the current situation in Missouri for each focus area**
- **Identify strengths and best practices, as well as gaps and challenges for each focus area**
- **Identify a list of resources for schools, districts and communities**
- **Identify suggestions for the Governor to consider**
- **Report to the Governor**

Task Force Findings/Suggestions by Focus Area

A. Effective Communication and Information Sharing

Background

Information sharing supports a safe and secure learning environment. Sharing information about emerging school safety threats, grants and other funding opportunities, innovative programs or best practices, and tips all support school safety. Parents, students, communities, law enforcement and leaders are part of an effective information sharing strategy including crisis communication, emergency information, and anonymous tip/threat reporting. Information shared accurately, effectively and efficiently facilitates good decision making.

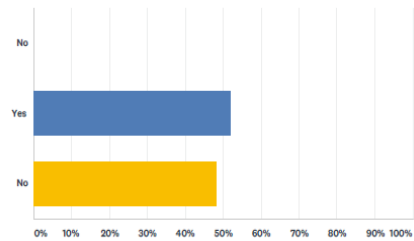
Strengths and Best Practices

At the state level, the Missouri Center for Education Safety (CES), shares information on threats, best practice programs, training, and other school safety related information with any K-12 school in Missouri who desires.

Similarly, the Missouri Information Analysis Center (MIAC), serves as an intelligence fusion center with a dedicated, full-time school safety analyst who shares information on school safety threats and trends with schools statewide.

Q23 Do all schools in your district utilize an anonymous tip or threat reporting tool?

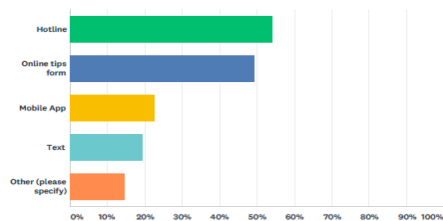
Answered: 235 Skipped: 56



DPS 2018 K-12 School Safety Survey – Question 23

Q24 What type of anonymous tip or threat reporting tool is used? (Select all that apply)

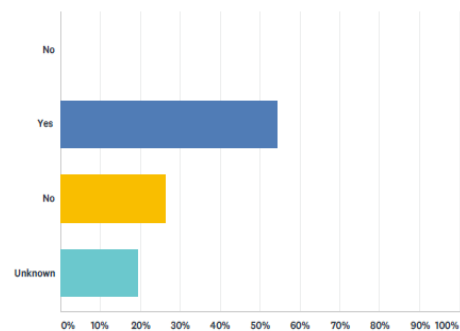
Answered: 124 Skipped: 167



DPS 2018 K-12 School Safety Survey – Question 24

Q26 Are the anonymous reporting tools monitored 24/7?

Answered: 118 Skipped: 173



DPS 2018 K-12 School Safety Survey – Question 26

The MIAC is also home to Missouri's School Violence Tip Line, also known as Courage 2 Report (C2R). The tip-line is monitored 24/7 to quickly triage threats and tips and bring intervention and prevention resources to bear.

Missouri has the unique ability to instantly contact every school district, charter school, and private/parochial school instantly via recorded phone call, text message, and e-mail, via the Missouri School Alert Network. The Alert Network is a critical part of the information sharing framework supporting school safety in Missouri.

Gaps and Challenges

Missouri does not have a formally recognized state-level school safety coordination center or state school safety coordinator. Multiple states have gone to this model to facilitate the rapid sharing of information. Additionally, many states have state-level school safety advisory councils that support and guide the activities of the school safety coordination center.

Internally, staff and students alike frequently cite a lack of school safety-related communication with teachers or administrators as a source of frustration and concern. From the disposition of disciplinary referrals to pending legal matters and potential dangers, a lack of communication creates uncertainty. Students confirm that the 'rumor mill' is often the primary source of communication they receive and that a perceived lack of follow-up impedes information sharing. Students acknowledged that there may be legal restrictions on sharing personal information.

Task Force testimony from teens indicates they prefer timely school safety information directly from teachers or administrators in their schools. Contrary to the conventional wisdom of many consultants, students expressed little appetite for Apps which take up screen space on their portable devices and are infrequently used, instead preferring hyperlinks embedded in their preferred social media platforms like Instagram or SnapChat. The concept of a student lead Student School Safety Advisory Council was suggested by students, to engage students in the school safety conversation. These councils, under the leadership of the local school board, will help facilitate the sharing of information between students and staff.

Schools across the state are working to bridge the communication gap with varying methods and degrees of success that are still to be determined. The "Virginia Model" of behavioral risk assessment was held up as a model in no small part because it facilitates internal communication. Testimony confirmed many stakeholders are unaware of the volume of evidenced-based best practices, training and resources available to them, much of it free of charge, at the state level.

Externally, informational silos abound, often along organizational lines, which result in efforts being duplicated across multiple agencies with related missions. After-action reports from Columbine to Parkland indicate that communication breakdowns were the norm rather than the exception.

B. Mental Health/Behavioral Risk

Background

Mental health issues and mental health care are consistent themes from the local to the national level. Schools report mental health-related problems increasing annually, without a corresponding increase in available mental health resources. Many communities and schools lack high-quality treatment for children and adolescents.

Although the presence of a mental illness may not be directly correlated to violence, trends with respect to youth mental illness are of great concern.

There is an urgent need to for effective prevention interventions and the ability to identify youth at-risk for mental illness in schools to connect them with needed treatment and services.

Comprehensive school-based mental health systems (CSMHS) are school-community partnerships that provide a continuum of mental health that support students, families, and the school community.

“Thirteen percent of youth aged 8-15 live with mental illness severe enough to cause significant impairment in their day-to-day lives. This figure jumps to 21 percent in youth aged 13-18. Half of all lifetime cases of mental illness begin by age 14 and three quarters by age 24. Early identification and intervention improve outcomes for children, before these conditions become far more serious, more costly and difficult to treat. Despite the availability of effective treatment, there are average delays of 8 to 10 years between the onset of symptoms and intervention—critical developmental years in the life of a child.” – American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, “Improving Lives, Avoiding Tragedy”, 2013.

Integrating Mental Health, Primary Care, Family Services and Court-Ordered Treatment

Students often come to school with multiple complex health, mental health, and social service needs. Schools can play an important role in cultivating healthy environments to prevent and mitigate mental health conditions. Developing and promoting models in which mental health are integrated into school and pediatric settings can help identify those in need of treatment and help them gain access. In general, the most successful integration programs include buy-in from committed leaders and are characterized by effective communication and collaboration among the care team.

Prevention and Early Intervention Programs to Divert Youth from the Justice System

Services to address mental health conditions and divert youth from the juvenile justice system have an essential role. These may include: substance abuse, social skill development, academic support, and mentoring.

Ensuring that at-risk youth receive timely and appropriate prevention and early intervention services is highly recommended as a best practice.

Using Suspicious Activity Reporting and Threat Assessments to Enhance School Safety

Studies have shown that, prior to incidents, most students either told someone about their plans or engaged in behavior that caused others to be concerned.

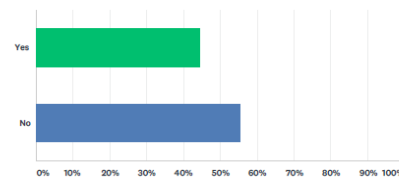
Before the Parkland shooting, multiple reports were received about the shooter's concerning behavior. How they were processed, evaluated and acted upon remains under review, but there is ample evidence to suggest that the individual was a potential threat and worthy of being assessed as such.

The Virginia school threat-assessment model is a team-based, three step process involving teachers, administrators, and key outside stakeholders such as law enforcement when appropriate, who know and interact with students on a day-to-day basis. The team identifies students of concern based upon their personal, first-hand knowledge, gathers information about their behavior and circumstances to assess whether they pose a risk of harm to themselves or the school community, and develops a management plan to mitigate that risk. The ultimate goal of a threat assessment team is to evaluate risk and implement evidence-based intervention strategies to address concerns.

Gaps and Challenges

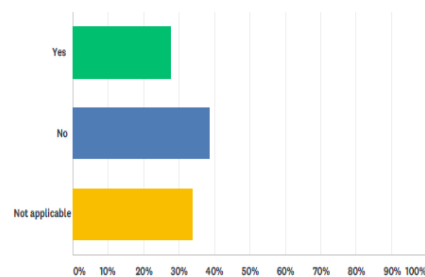
There is no designated lead agency to coordinate and synchronize mental health, behavioral risk, trauma informed care, and other programs related to school safety.

School Safety Survey
Q20 Do all schools in your district have a formal behavioral risk assessment team?
Answered: 238 Skipped: 53



DPS 2018 K-12 School Safety Survey – Question 20

Q22 Has there been an occasion the behavioral risk assessment team was utilized?
Answered: 225 Skipped: 66



DPS 2018 K-12 School Safety Survey – Question 22

Youth mental health provider shortages, as well as difficulty recruiting and retaining these professionals throughout the state, present challenges to schools and communities. In the absence of health care providers, teachers and administrators are frequently pressed into mental health service for which they are not prepared. Relatively simple training in Youth Mental Health First-Aid can better equip them for these circumstances.

Unique factors influence youth mental health and can sometimes delay treatment referrals and interventions. These factors include parent/caregiver consent for treatment, differentiation between normal child development and growing mental health concerns, family influence on youth mental health and functioning, readiness for change, ability and willingness participate in mental health treatment and availability during the school day. In addition, it must always be considered that this group, as a whole and individually, is experiencing significant and rapid social, emotional, cognitive and physical development.

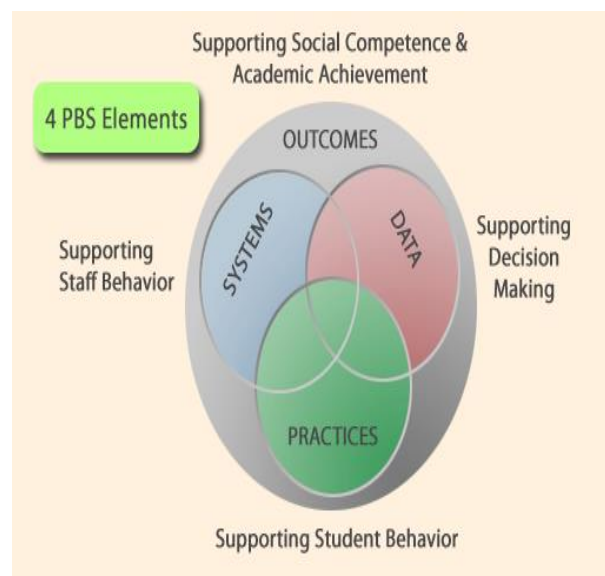
C. School Climate & School Culture

Background

School climate is the quality of relationships among students, staff, and teachers. It is determined by local customs and factors that may be unique to a specific geographic location, and may differ between rural and urban schools. The White House Federal Commission report stresses the importance of improving school climate, providing positive behavioral interventions and supports, and fostering social and emotional learning.

Strengths and Best Practices

Successful school climate programs such as Positive Behaviors Interventions and Supports (PBIS) or similar initiatives, encourage kindness, empathy and character, both in school and beyond. Several Missouri schools presented evidence of school climate programs improving grades while also reducing absenteeism, bullying, fights, and parent complaints. Additionally, successful programs are increasingly 'Trauma Informed', meaning they make a conscious effort to consider the real and potential role of trauma in human behavior.



Gaps and Challenges

Though there are numerous programs supporting positive school climates, state data suggests many Missouri schools have not implemented a formal program in support of a positive school culture.

The preponderance of schools desire positive student-teacher interactions, a safe environment where students feel connected, parental involvement, and increased teacher interaction, yet few have taken steps to cultivate them. These and other outcomes relating to school safety are not coincidental, but rather come as a result of focused effort and specific training on topics such as positive behavior supports and trauma informed responses.

In 2016, Missouri enacted the Trauma-Informed Schools Initiative, requiring DESE, DMH, and DSS to provide information and training on the trauma-informed approach to all school districts. There is no requirement for Missouri schools to be trauma informed.

D. Emergency Operations Plans

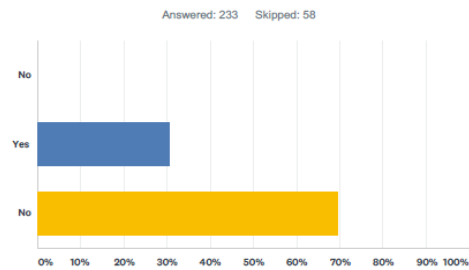
Background

Emergency planning is critical to ensuring a school is capable of protecting its students, faculty, and staff, and this planning should be manifested in a written Emergency Operations Plan (EOP) that is shared with law enforcement and first responders, as well as with parents and community leaders as appropriate. EOPs should cover emergency scenarios from the time a student steps on the bus until the last extracurricular activity or sporting event is completed, and serves as a guide to students, staff and emergency responders.

Strengths and Best Practices

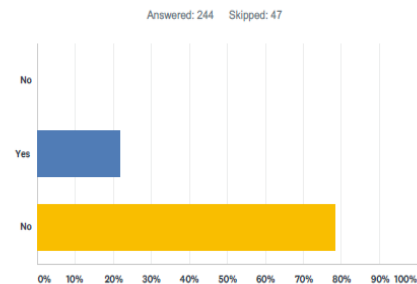
Effective EOPs are viewed as living and breathing documents that are continually updated based upon threats, capabilities, new technologies and personnel. High Quality EOPs will also reflect National

Q30 Does your district have a formal school climate/school culture program?



DPS 2018 K-12 School Safety Survey – Question 30

Q4 Does your district use a tool such as Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools (REMS) Technical Assistance (TA) Center Emergency Operations Plan (EOP) assessment tool to ensure schools have high quality EOPs?



DPS 2018 K-12 School Safety Survey – Question 4

Incident Management System (NIMS) and Incident Command System (ICS) methodologies.

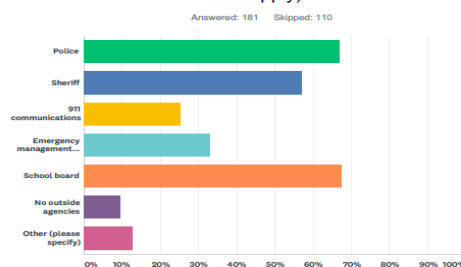
Given the very nature of these plans, there is frequently an internal struggle about whom plans should be shared with and to what extent. Current trends and data suggest that emergency operations plans need to be shared, with teachers and staff, emergency personnel, local law enforcement and first responders.

The most effective high quality EOPs are those that are frequently tested and evaluated, then changed, revised, and updated based upon the testing and drills.

Gaps and Challenges

State law mandates all schools to have an EOP, but it does not mandate sharing that plan with law enforcement, first responders or others. The continuum of sharing EOPs is bookended by two options: sharing with no one, and sharing with everyone. Neither extreme is ideal, but most Missouri schools err on the side of not sharing enough and end up having what may be an effective response plan for a particular situation, but because the plan was not shared appropriately, teachers and staff may not know how to implement it and law enforcement and first responders lack the knowledge to efficiently coordinate a mutual response.

Q6 With whom do schools in your district share their EOPs? (Select all that apply)



DPS 2018 K-12 School Safety Survey – Question 6

Few schools use formal evaluation criteria to analyze their EOPs and ensure they meet the defined standards of a high-quality plan. Earning the designation of a high-quality plan does not guarantee that it will be effectively implemented absent appropriate sharing of information, testing and revisions, but it does ensure the plan is thoughtfully constructed and considered to cover a variety of potential threats.

Where EOPs fall under the Missouri Sunshine Law has been, and likely will continue to be, a source of debate. Whether or not school EOPs are a public record under the Sunshine Law should not be a matter of interpretation, but rather should be explicit.

Emergency Operations Planning has become its own business model, and the market is continually growing. In and of itself, this is not a bad thing as many companies and consultants provide invaluable assistance. However, because of the size of the market, and because teachers and administrators are in the business of teaching children, it can be very difficult for schools to determine what companies and products are helpful and reputable, and which are not.

E. Physical Security/Technology and Safety Assessments/Audits

Background

Physical security is currently receiving the preponderance of focus in the national discussion relating to school safety. This is logical in the wake of school shootings where the lack, or break down, of physical security played a role in enabling violence. The assessment of school’s physical security through a standardized methodology can help to identify the vulnerabilities in a school, and can be used to further strengthen a school’s defense against an active shooter or other risk.

Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) is a promising best practice which is embraced and promoted by the National Association of School Resource Officers (NASRO), and any physical security safety assessment should take into account some of the CPTED principals which help promote safer buildings.

Strengths and Best Practices

Physical security helps make schools safer when those physical security measures are developed and undertaken as a result of on-site and campus assessments including specific risks and vulnerabilities. Some states have embraced the idea of pouring money into physical security and technology only to realize that these funds are often utilized inefficiently unless a thorough assessment is done in advance which defines and articulates the risks faced, and then invests available resources to mitigate those risks.

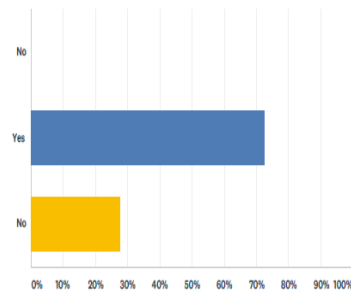
Numerous schools use hazard and risk assessment teams to identify specific threats and vulnerabilities. When physical security and technology improvements are driven by data from assessments, then students and staff at schools are safer from threats ranging from an active shooter to weather and natural disasters.

Gaps and Challenges

Currently, there is no available standard evaluation criteria for school safety-related technology, products, and services. This often leaves school administrators at the mercy of the slickest sales pitch and ill-equipped to do a meaningful assessment to find the right procurement choice.

Q8 Have physical security site assessments been conducted of school buildings in your district?

Answered: 247 Skipped: 44

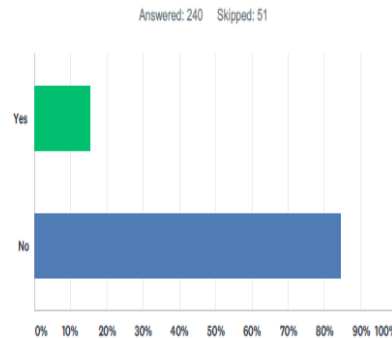


DPS 2018 K-12 School Safety Survey – Question 8

While many schools have conducted security site assessments in their buildings, there is not a standard template being used. Information provided at public hearings suggests that physical security is being evaluated with the potential for an active shooter from the outside as the most likely threat. Cybersecurity risks, insider threats, evacuation and sheltering should also be evaluated.

An accurate physical security site assessment involves first identifying risks and vulnerabilities facing the school. However, it appears more than 80 percent of Missouri schools surveyed endeavored to conduct site assessments in the absence of identifying specific hazards and risks.

Q11 Has the district conducted a vulnerability or hazards risk assessments for each school similar to the DHS vulnerability risk assessment matrix? (To access this resource in the Homeland Security Information Network, enter the portal as a guest. You will have full access and the ability to download the matrix and users guide.)



DPS 2018 K-12 School Safety Survey – Question 11

F. Training & Drills

Background, Strengths, and Best Practices Already in Place

Effective training is critical to school safety. Effective training involves the right personnel in realistic situations and must include performance feedback. All training, whether in athletics, the military, or law enforcement, ideally follows a documented and tracked crawl-walk-run progression. In the crawl phase, personnel are instructed on their responsibilities in response to simple scenarios, then these responses are practiced to proficiency. In the walk phase, additional variables and/or timeline reduction adds complexity. In the run phase, events should occur in real-time with multiple variables. In every phase, individual and collective responses must be honestly and candidly evaluated, with the expectation deficiencies are corrected in subsequent exercises.

The most efficient and effective training relating to school safety includes input and participation from appropriate emergency responders, administration, staff and students.

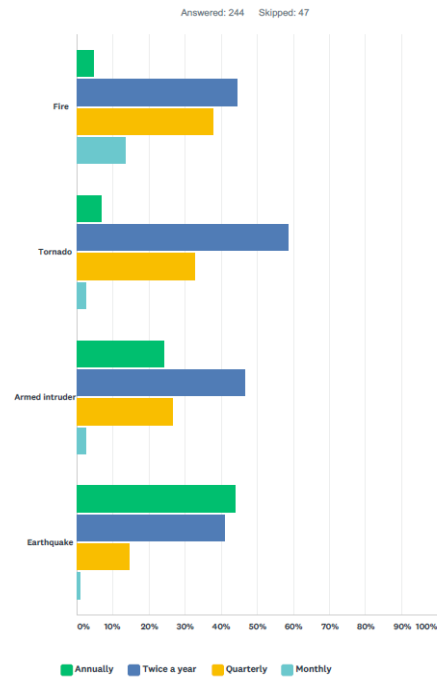
Gaps and Challenges

There is no comprehensive school safety training catalog, listing offerings across all state departments and programs or organizations. As a result, efforts are often duplicated. In some instances, instruction given by one organization is directly at odds with policy or that of another partner.

Missouri does not have a set of standards for conducting drills and exercises. Schools have seen law enforcement utilize simulated gunfire with frangible ammo in drills, without advanced notice to participants, on more than one occasion.

Often drills are conducted without a clear understanding by all parties involved of what is being tested or evaluated, and little to no documentation of the results to help correct deficiencies.

Q7 What types of drills does your district routinely conduct? (Select all that apply)



DPS 2018 K-12 School Safety Survey – Question 7

G. School Resource Officer (SRO) and Safety Coordinator Programs

Background

DESE requires a school safety coordinator in every school, to provide support to school administrators and school boards on school safety issues. Additionally, Missouri law establishes the training and certification requirements for armed School Resource Officers (SROs) and armed School Protection Officers (SPOs) for schools that choose to have them. These men and women are critical to school safety for the relationships they develop with students and because of their role as a conduit to emergency response.



Role of an SRO Program

Strengths and Best Practices

School districts that most effectively employ SROs have them in every building and incorporate them into training development, risk assessment, and threat assessment while understanding that SROs also have an influence far beyond their law enforcement capabilities. The Missouri Center for Education Safety has established training and ongoing professional development criteria for both SROs and SPOs and provides regional and annual training for school safety coordinators, SROs and SPOs.

Gaps and Challenges

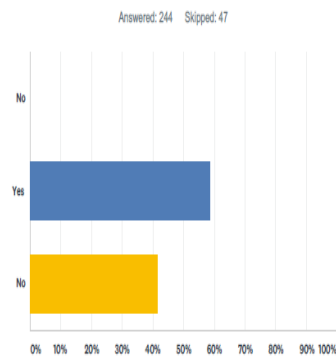
A) SRO Programs:

While many school districts have a school resources officer dedicated either full-time or part-time for individual campuses, a significant number do not. Of those who do have SROs in their schools, many do not utilize MOUs with law enforcement agencies to govern the relationship between SROs and the district.

SRO funding is a challenge for many communities. Typically, one of three models is used: 1) Law enforcement funds the position(s); 2) The position is jointly funded between law enforcement agencies and school districts; 3) The school district funds 100% of the cost of the SRO program. Funding decisions are made entirely at the district level as Missouri does not provide funding for SRO programs in individual school districts.

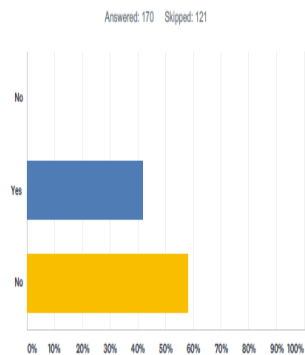
Based upon testimony, timely information is not shared across the SRO universe. While mechanisms exist to communicate information to SROs, the mechanisms are unreliable. Based on this apparent gap, CES has already started to disseminate a weekly school safety update to law enforcement including SROs.

Q12 Do schools in your district have a school resource officer (SRO), school marshal, or school security?



DPS 2018 K-12 School Safety Survey –

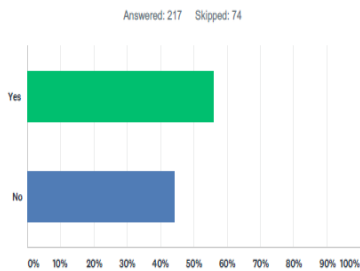
Q14 If they are not district employees, do the schools or district have a formal MOU with local law enforcement to provide an SRO?



DPS 2018 K-12 School Safety Survey –

B) School Protection Officer (SPO) Program

Q18 Do you require each safety coordinator to receive initial training?



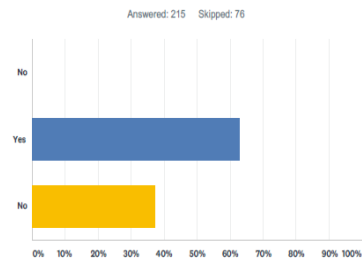
DPS 2018 K-12 School Safety Survey – question 18

Established by statute in 2018, the SPO program allows schools to choose to arm staff that meet specific training requirements. This program is completely voluntary and up to each school and governing body. To date, few schools have implemented this program.

C) School Safety Coordinator Programs:

At present, DESE’s MSIP guidelines state that every school district should have a school safety coordinator in place. However, there is no language in the guidelines which defines the job duties, roles, training, or expectations for this position. The amount of effort assigned staff put into this role varies greatly from district to district as does the amount of initial and ongoing training.

Q19 Do you require each safety coordinator to receive on-going safety related training?



DPS 2018 K-12 School Safety Survey – question 19

H. Access to Grants and Funding Opportunities for School Safety

Background

Funding school safety does not equal safe schools. However, a minimum threshold level of funding at the state and local level to support basic school safety programs is critical. There is no national/federal school safety funding program currently in place, and federal grant programs supporting school safety are fragmented and inconsistent.

Over half of all states have a formal state-level school safety center. Ultimately, every school is responsible for their individual safety efforts, but a statewide school safety center with robust information sharing, training, technical support, and other capabilities provides a depth and breadth of resources and expertise to better prepare individual schools and districts. There is no consistency on how state level school safety centers are funded, and Missouri’s current Center for Education

Safety funding has been minimal since its inception as a public/private partnership between the Department of Public Safety and the Missouri School Boards' Association in 2010.

Local schools likewise do not have a consistent school safety-related funding methodology. Larger and more affluent schools might be able to afford a professional grant writing staff, but smaller and less affluent schools struggle to even apply for basic school safety-related grants and other funding opportunities.

Strengths and Best Practices

State legislatures across the country are appropriating millions of dollars to fund a variety of school safety initiatives, in amounts ranging from \$400 million in Florida to \$300,000 in Missouri. The most effective efforts come through cooperative state and local efforts to support prevention, mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery efforts. These efforts are best focused to consistently and uniformly support local schools through a state level school safety center.

Gaps and Challenges

In Missouri, grants for school safety are often not coordinated between state agencies and no organization has been designated to lead these coordination efforts. As a result, departments are often pursuing similar goals via different avenues and absent coordination with one another.

The existing statewide school safety center does not have the staff or resources to effectively compete for federal grants, nor be a conduit of information and/or resources to local schools so that they might be able to competitively apply for federal grants related to school safety.

I. Legal – Statutory Constraints on School Safety

Background

A consistent theme at every outreach session was the impact of federal regulations on school safety. Both the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) were cited as frequent impediments because of real or misperceived limits on sharing personal information with appropriate personnel, even if that information was critical to school safety.

Gaps and Challenges

Due to an expressed fear of violation of these federal regulations, most school districts have chosen to play it as safe as possible, erring on the side of not sharing information rather than sharing too much.

The real impact of these laws on preventing information sharing that could have prevented an attack or act of violence is unknown. However, the lack of practical knowledge on what can and cannot be shared is concerning, not just from the perspective of a student harming other students, but also a student harming themselves.

J. Cybersecurity & Risk

Background, Strengths and Best Practices

One of the most significant ways schools have changed from the past has been via the massive infusion of technology. K-12 schools are increasingly reliant on technology and sophisticated IT systems for teaching, learning and school operations. Across the nation, local K-12 schools are reported to have the least mature cybersecurity risk management practices of any state, local, tribal, or territorial government agency. Data suggests that many K-12 information technology leaders need to take additional steps to secure their networks and data.

Gaps and Challenges

Missouri schools appear to be in line with the rest of the nation. Recent audits of Missouri schools' IT programs found multiple deficiencies in multiple areas in a limited sampling.

K. Other

1. Effects of Press Coverage of Mass Shootings

Background, Strengths and Best Practices

Press coverage of school shootings is sensational. This sensational coverage exacerbates trauma of those affected and perpetuates additional school shootings. Research has determined most shooters desire fame, have a fascination with other mass shooters, and view their actions as a competition of sorts in which they seek to beat their predecessors by leaving even more carnage in their wake.

Social media only amplifies this problem. In the absence of traditional journalistic tools—like editorial discretion—social media allows for the wide dissemination of information, where nearly every individual can be a contributor and a consumer (including would-be shooters).

Public testimony in one or more of the outreach sessions also supported measured media coverage of school violence, such as not identifying the perpetrator, in the belief that not giving them notoriety would discourage future acts of violence in our schools.

Gaps and Challenges

Government does not control the press, nor should it. The First Amendment is not suspended because of school violence. Schools, emergency responders, and law enforcement officials have to adapt to the modern reality through effective crisis communication, training, and mitigating the effect reporting has on encouraging future attacks.

2. Sexual Predators in Schools & Expanded Background Checks for School Staff, Volunteers, and Others

Background, Strengths, and Best Practices

Sexual predators can be found in a variety of settings, including holding trusted positions in our schools. Data from a 2010 Government Accountability Report showing that on average, an offending teacher can be transferred to three different schools before he or she is reported to the police. In Missouri during the 2017-2018 school year, 15 school staff (14 male, 1 female) were arrested, charged, and convicted of criminal sexual activity. In the 2018-2019 school year, that number held steady with 15 individuals (11 male, 4 female) similarly charged.

Missouri statutes expressly prohibit school districts from offering employment to prospective hires without fully researching the individual's complete work history in other school districts. Additionally, Missouri statutes mandate full disclosure between districts regarding former employees when requested, specifically regarding confirmed violations of a board policy related to abusive behavior toward a student.

Beginning with the 2020-21 school year, school districts will be required to provide "trauma-informed, developmentally-appropriate sexual abuse training to students in all grades not lower than sixth grade." This part of the statutes requires school districts to provide students with the knowledge and tools to recognize sexual abuse, report an incident of sexual abuse; actions that a student who is a victim of sexual abuse can take to obtain assistance and intervention; and available resources for students affected by sexual abuse.

CES staff have conducted extensive research on sexual predators, including interviewing incarcerated perpetrators and their victims, to produce effective training for school staffs.

Gaps and Challenges

Multiple superintendents voiced concerns that offering training is all but admitting a problem. This mindset is not conducive to prevention or investigating concerns. District and state-level actions must be careful to consider ancillary services such as food delivery, school picture/yearbook companies, and others who have a legitimate and important role on school property at specific times, to ensure their policies do not inadvertently prohibit them.

3. Schools as Public Polling Places

Background, Strengths and Best Practices

Multiple districts expressed concerns with Missouri's 1977 statutes mandating tax-supported public buildings be made available as polling places. In some schools on election days buildings are open to the public and create a potential risk. This situation is not unique to Missouri, and has been highlighted in other states such as New Hampshire and New Jersey.

Gaps and Challenges

Missouri statutes require public buildings to be available to serve as polling places. While many districts have worked with election boards to address concerns and mitigate risks, others have not been able to do so.

4. Responsible Gun Ownership & Gun Storage

Background

Firearms, in and of themselves, do not cause violent attacks. Discussions relating to firearms can be polarizing and elicit emotional responses from all sides, but all testimony to the Task Force was focused and diplomatic. At each of the outreach sessions testimony was given advocating responsible gun ownership and safely storing weapons. Data referenced during testimony indicates most firearms used in school attacks come from the shooters' own homes, or homes of friends and family.

The existing school safety program promotes the 12 Things program originally adopted by the National Crime Prevention Council, which includes responsible gun ownership and storage in both the 12 Things for Parents and 12 Things for Students sections.

Conclusion

Missouri schools are, overwhelmingly, very safe places for children to learn and grow. Schools across the state are aware of their responsibilities to educate and protect and are taking actions to do both better. This is an ongoing and continual process, for which there cannot be a definitive end.

The School Safety Task Force acknowledges this report is in many ways a two-dimensional picture of school safety in Missouri, with one dimension being the past and the other the present. Both are important and both point toward the future where threats to school safety will continue to evolve and change as will the preparations and capabilities to meet them. As such, the efforts of the Task Force, from April 4th until now, represent a first step in what should be an ongoing process to critically evaluate school safety capabilities across Missouri.

The recommendations contained in this report come as a result of extensive debate amongst a broad range of stakeholders. Some are simple to implement. Others are more complicated. All are intended to bring about substantive improvements to school safety.

The Task Force recognizes collecting accurate data is vital to monitoring school safety progress, and acknowledges that methodologies for collecting necessary data may need improvement as part of on-going planning and evaluation.

Finally, the Task Force would like to acknowledge Governor Parson's leadership on this important issue. It is no small thing to empower a group to take a critical look at school safety across the state, and the governor's willingness to do so, is a credit to his commitment to education in Missouri.

Strategic Plan

The Strategic Plan for school safety, which was developed by the Task Force, based on both public and subject matter expert input, and aligned along this report's Focus Areas, is herein incorporated by reference.

Appendixes

In order to keep the report concise and focused, related relevant information is being provided via appendixes to this Report, and herein incorporated by reference:

- A – School Safety Glossary
- B - School Safety Resources for Missouri K-12 Schools
- C – Missouri School Safety Program Historical Overview
- D - White House Commission Suggestions for States and Local Government
- E- List of White House Commission Federal Resources

(End of Report)