

A Framework for Safe and Successful Schools

Considerations and Action Steps

In 2013, national education groups representing principals, school-employed mental health professionals, and school resource officers developed [A Framework for Safe and Successful Schools](#) to provide a common set of recommendations for policies and practices that create and sustain safe, supportive learning environments. The goal was, and is, to reinforce the interdisciplinary, collaborative, and cohesive approach required to improve school climate, implement multitiered systems of support, advance positive discipline practices, and increase access to the mental and behavioral health services necessary to meet the needs of all children and youth. Endorsed by over 100 organizations and experts, the Framework has successfully influenced important policy including the Comprehensive School Safety Initiative, the Every Student Succeeds Act, and various state and local school safety efforts. Despite the positive steps forward, there is still much work to be done to ensure every school has a safe and supportive learning environment.

This supplemental guidance offers additional considerations and action steps to help school leaders implement comprehensive school safety efforts as outlined in the Framework. In addition to the Framework itself, this guidance can be used in conjunction with the 2017 [“Policy Recommendations for Implementing the Framework”](#) and [“Assessing the Safety of the School Environment Using the Framework”](#) as well as the resources provided below.

We *strongly* caution against seemingly quick and potentially harmful solutions that intend to harden our schools, such as arming school personnel, and we urge education and policy leaders to implement the evidence-based policies and practices articulated in the Framework.

IMPORTANCE OF NEEDS ASSESSMENT AND DATA BASED DECISION MAKING

School building and district leaders should make decisions regarding school safety that are rooted in data and include the systematic examination of best practices research in conjunction with a needs assessment of their local school [community](#).

Action Steps to Facilitate Data-Based Decision Making at the District and School Building Levels

- Develop a process for regular examination of school initiatives to improve student outcomes by exploring the following questions:
 - Are any initiatives redundant?
 - Are all initiatives directly related to the school improvement plan?
 - Do you have staff, family, and community buy-in?
 - Do you have sufficient, appropriate, and evidence-based services in all tiers (prevention/early intervention, targeted support, intensive support)?

- Does planned professional development support the ability of staff to address identified needs?
- Is professional development appropriately targeted to specific professionals in terms of their roles and areas of expertise?

BRAIDING FUNDING TO ADDRESS SCHOOL SAFETY

Local education agencies can utilize various funding sources (both private and public) to support implementation of various aspects of the *Framework for Safe and Successful Schools*. School boards are encouraged to work collaboratively with local superintendents and other district and building leaders to maximize the most efficient use of competitive grants as well as local, state, and federal funds to effectively address school safety. These include:

Title I of ESSA (formula to state to district). Local allowable uses include:

- Implementing a school-wide program to improve student outcomes by providing counseling and school-based mental health supports
- Implementing a multitiered system of behavioral supports

Title II of ESSA (formula to state to district). Local allowable uses include:

- Professional development on topics such as:
 - Improving school safety
 - Identifying and referring students in need of mental and behavioral health services
 - Incorporating [trauma informed practices](#) into the school

Title IV-A of ESSA (formula to state to district). Local allowable uses include:

- Implementing:
 - Comprehensive mental and behavioral health service delivery systems
 - Trauma-informed practices
 - Evidence-based violence prevention programming
 - Initiatives to improve school climate, including antibullying programs
- Providing ongoing professional development and training to facilitate early identification and intervention of students at risk
- Developing and offering positive discipline strategies and other efforts to reduce inappropriate use of exclusionary discipline

Relevant Resources

- Office of Safe and Healthy Students, Department of Education
<https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/oese/oshs/index.html>
- Committee for Education Funding Budget Information
<https://cef.org/charts-and-resources/charts/>

ALIGNING POLICIES AND FUNDING

Establishing clear policy priorities based on data at the district level enables school leaders to direct funding most effectively to programs and practices that will genuinely address safety concerns and improve student and school outcomes. Such decisions should not be unilateral. Rather, school boards and superintendents should maintain a cooperative relationship in which regular information sharing, input from stakeholders, and collaborative decision making is routinely practiced.

Role of School Boards and Superintendents

Elected or appointed members of the school board are generally responsible for setting a budget for district education initiatives and frequently determine funding levels. Decisions about funding and other about district policy should be rooted in data, and determined in collaboration with superintendents and other school leaders, with input from multiple stakeholders including principals, teachers, specialized instructional support personnel, parents, community members, and students at the secondary level as appropriate. Superintendents are ultimately responsible for ensuring that schools abide by district-set policy, while also giving principals and building administrators the support and flexibility to meet the unique needs of their individual school community.

District-Level Policies to Improve School Safety

It is imperative that district- and building-level policies respect the rights of all students. Efforts to improve school safety must not include policy or practices, including exclusionary discipline, that result in the discrimination of any group of students or result in disproportionately negative outcomes for any group. School safety can and should be balanced against protecting the rights of all students to benefit from an education in a safe and supportive learning environment.

- Establish a district-level safety and crisis response leadership team that includes key personnel: principals, teachers, school-employed mental health professionals (e.g., school counselor, school psychologist, school social worker), instruction/curriculum professionals, school resource/safety officer, parents, and a staff member skilled in data collection and analysis. The district team establishes overall policies and practices and provides support to building-level teams.
- Develop and implement positive discipline policy and practice that reduces reliance on overly punitive practices and reduces the inappropriate use of suspension and expulsion.
- Ensure that school discipline remains the responsibility of school administrators, not law enforcement.
- Establish a memorandum of understanding between the district and law enforcement or security agencies that clearly articulates the role of the school resource officers/school security personnel, the required training necessary to work in a school setting, and clear prohibition of involvement in disciplinary decisions that do not involve breaking the law.
- Make ongoing and sustained investments in efforts to improve comprehensive school safety and school climate.
- Include school climate and school safety goals in the district strategic plan.
- Regularly examine the use/effectiveness of all physical security measures (e.g., cameras, metal detectors, armed and unarmed security personnel).
 - Examine the use of these measures in conjunction with student perception of school safety.
 - Require regular collection of school climate data to inform school improvement efforts.

- Develop and implement procedures (including anonymous reporting) for students, staff, and families to report potential threats or other concerning behaviors.
- Concurrently implement evidence-based suicide risk and threat assessment and management protocols.
- Develop a team-based threat assessment protocol. Team members should include appropriate administrator(s), school-employed mental health professional, and the school resource officer or other law enforcement who are properly trained in threat assessment.
- Ensure that suicide risk assessment (which is different than threat assessment) is conducted by a trained mental health professional and that clear protocols for safeguarding the student, referrals, and parent notification are in place.

Building-Level Policies to Improve School Safety

- Establish a school safety and crisis team that includes key personnel: principals, teachers, school-employed mental health professionals, school nurse, instruction/curriculum professionals, school resource/safety officer, parents, and a staff member skilled in data collection and analysis. This team should generally align with the district team in terms of structure, processes, and team member roles.
- Establish a multi-disciplinary team approach for regularly reviewing student data (both behavioral and academic)
 - Allow sufficient staff time to review program and intervention effectiveness, identify areas of continued improvement, plan implementation, and receive relevant professional development.
- Promote positive behavior interventions and supports and other positive discipline strategies that reduce the inappropriate and disproportionate use of suspension and expulsion.
- Include explicit goals related to school climate and school safety in the school/district level improvement plan.
- Develop and implement procedures (including anonymous reporting) for students, staff, and families to report potential threats or other concerning behaviors.
 - This must be coupled with evidence-based risk and threat assessment and management protocols.
- Ensure transparency and engagement by communicating goals, plans, and outcomes with stakeholders.

Relevant Resources

- Policy Recommendations for Implementing the Framework
<https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources/school-safety-and-crisis/a-framework-for-safe-and-successful-schools/policy-recommendations-for-implementing-the-framework-for-safe-and-successful-schools>

This document includes links to relevant policy documents of the author organizations.

BALANCING PHYSICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY

Any effort to address school safety must balance psychological safety with building security/physical safety. Schools must make concerted efforts to create positive, inclusive, respectful, and responsive learning

environments. Sole reliance on highly restrictive physical security measures does not improve school safety and can undermine the learning environment. Schools can better balance physical and psychological safety by:

- Deliberately engaging in efforts to create a school climate that fosters trusting relationships between students and staff, establishes clear expectations and respectful behavior, ensures equity in opportunity for all students, and promotes learning.
- Creating a welcoming environment that values diversity, collaboration, community and family engagement.
- Consulting with district building security experts to ensure proper lighting, secure access points to the school campus, and other appropriate natural access controls are functioning effectively.
- Establishing a clear and enforceable check-in/check-out system that includes visitor identification and training for school staff to recognize and report individuals who are not properly identified.
- Developing reporting and response systems for students, staff, and members of the school community in the event of a potential threat.
- Ensuring school resource officers have the proper training to work in a school environment and including them in school safety related professional development.

Armed Security

Decisions about school building security should be a local decision based on needs analysis and local community context. If a school determines the need for armed security, it is recommended that the only armed professional be a trained school resource officer who receives ongoing and frequent firearms practice that includes training exercises in simulated, high stress conditions. There is significant risk associated with arming teachers and other school personnel who lack the necessary training to accurately engage in an active shooter situation.

Relevant Resources

- NASRO Statements Regarding Arming Teachers
<https://nasro.org/news/press-releases/nasro-expands-upon-recommendation-arming-teachers/>
<https://nasro.org/news/press-releases/nasro-opposes-arming-teachers/>
- Effective School-Wide Discipline
http://www.nasponline.org/Documents/Resources%20and%20Publications/Handouts/Families%20and%20Educators/Schoolwide_Discipline_NASSP_February2012.pdf
- Utilizing School Climate in School Improvement Plans
<https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/edscls>
- School Climate Measurement
<https://www.schoolclimate.org/services/measuring-school-climate-csci>
- Threat Assessment for Administrators and Crisis Teams
<https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources/school-safety-and-crisis/threat-assessment-at-school>
- Responding to Students Who Threaten Violence
https://www.nasponline.org/Documents/Resources%20and%20Publications/Resources/Crisis/Threat_Assessment_Reeves.Brock_2018_Rev.pdf

SCHOOL-BASED MENTAL AND BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SERVICES

School-based mental and behavioral health services are essential and integral components of safe, supportive schools. Importantly, students are more likely to seek help if they know help is available at school. Many, if not most, school districts across the country need to improve access to services and supports in order to improve the quality of the learning environment, student behavior and well-being, academic outcomes, and overall safety. Ultimately, this requires increased levels of school-employed mental health professionals (school psychologists, school social workers, school counselors and, in some cases, school nurses), as well as improved models of service delivery that employ multitiered systems of support and appropriate and collaborative partnerships with community service providers.

Action Steps to Improve Access to and Effectiveness of Services

- Address shortages of school-employed mental health professionals. This will require a long-term plan that considers recommended ratios, current staffing levels, unfilled positions, role definitions, assigned duties, and projected student population growth. Shorter-term and intermediate steps to improve access can include:
 - Working with school mental health staff to identify duties (e.g., certain assessments, case management) that could potentially be done on ***a temporary basis*** by contract services. This can help free school mental health staff time to provide other mental health services such as counseling, risk and threat assessments, consultation with teachers and other school staff, intervention and program planning and evaluation.
 - Developing relationships with community providers to supplement, not supplant, school-based services. School–community partnerships should not be seen as an appropriate substitute for adequate access to school-employed mental health professionals.
- Assess students’ unmet mental health needs in order to direct resources at the most critical needs. This should include examining:
 - The extent and frequency of adversity, stress, or trauma exposure among the student population
 - Universal screening for related mental and behavioral health concerns, coupled with early identification and intervention systems* which should include:
 - Routine professional development in mental health issues designed to help educators recognize struggling students
 - A clear system for teachers and staff to refer students to the school counselor, psychologist, social worker, or other mental health professional
 - A system for students to self-refer to the school counselor, psychologist, social worker, or other mental health professional
- Leverage collaboration with community services. Identify existing and potential community partners, develop memoranda of understanding to clarify roles and responsibilities, and assign appropriate school staff to guide these partnerships, such as school-employed mental health professionals and principals.

* It should be noted that early identification and intervention systems facilitate providing supports to students struggling with a mental health problem as early possible. These systems are different than an Early Warning System, the sole purpose of which is to identify students at risk of violence.

Relevant Resources

- Key Elements of a Successful School Community Partnership
http://www.nasponline.org/assets/documents/Research%20and%20Policy/Advocacy%20Resources/Community%20Schools%20White%20Paper_Jan_2016.pdf
- Effective School Staffing Model: Teaming School Counselors, School Psychologists, and School Social Workers
www.nasponline.org/schoolsafetyframework

SAFETY AND CRISIS TEAM AND PLAN DEVELOPMENT

Districts and each school building should require the establishment of a dedicated safety/crisis response team that includes, at a minimum, district/building level administrators, school principals, school-employed mental health professionals, school security, community stakeholders, parents, and other school staff as appropriate. This team should help coordinate school safety efforts, including emergency preparedness activities, and should meet on a regular basis.

Action Steps to Establish Effective Safety and Crisis Efforts

- Review the school safety and crisis response plan on a regular basis.
- Ensure that school safety and crisis plans account for all key components of preparedness, including prevention, mitigation, protection, response, and recovery.
- Identify key members of the school safety team (administrator, school-employed mental health professional, and school resource officer) to serve on the threat assessment team and provide them appropriate training.
- Develop threat assessment practices with the understanding that the *goal of a threat assessment is to prevent immediate harm and provide the student with supports to address the underlying cause of the behavior and/or emotional and psychological issues*. An evidence-based threat assessment involves:
 - evaluation and classification of the threat,
 - appropriate response and intervention, and
 - suicide risk assessment conducted by a trained mental health professional, as these students are often also suicidal.
- Provide education on the risk of student profiling. Importantly, there is NO profile of a student who will cause harm, and the use of profiling increases the likelihood of misidentifying students who are thought to pose a threat.
- Establish a process for determining which types of emergency drills are most relevant for you school community (e.g., evacuation, shelter-in-place, severe weather such as a hurricane or tornado, lockdown/armed intruder), what level of drills are necessary (tabletop discussion based, skills practicing, full scale simulation), and an annual schedule for conducting the drills that accounts for different times of day and scenarios. Ensure that plans consider the needs of student with disabilities. This should include accommodations for emergency drills, physical provisions in the event of an evacuation, etc.

Relevant Resources

- Alignment Between PREPaRE & U.S. Government Recommendations
https://www.nasponline.org/Documents/Professional%20Development/PREPaRE/PREPaRE_DOE_EmergPlanGuide_Comparison.pdf

- Responding to Students Who Threaten Violence https://www.nasponline.org/Documents/Resources%20and%20Publications/Resources/Crisis/Threat_Assessment_Reeves.Brock_2018_Rev.pdf
- Conducting Crisis Exercises and Drills: Guidelines for Schools <https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources/school-safety-and-crisis/conducting-crisis-exercises-and-drills>
- Best Practices for Schools in Active Shooter and Other Armed Assailant Drills <https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources/school-safety-and-crisis/best-practice-considerations-for-schools-in-active-shooter-and-other-armed-assailant-drills>

IMPORTANCE OF ONGOING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Districts and individual schools should intentionally offer targeted and relevant professional development for school staff and community partners addressing school climate and safety, positive behavior, and crisis prevention, preparedness, and response. Professional development needs to be targeted to relevant staff based on need and function. Examples of topics and appropriate audiences include:

All School Staff

- Early identification and appropriate referral process for student concern
- Fostering a positive school (and classroom) climate
- Positive discipline strategies (e.g., reinforcing student self-management skills, restorative justice)
- District and building emergency drill policy and procedure (including regular practice of drills)
- Fostering family engagement
- Trauma-informed practices
- Recognizing and responding to bullying and harassing behavior

School Crisis Team Members (e.g., school mental health professionals, school resource officer, school nurse, and building administrators)

- Threat assessment and management
- Suicide risk assessment and interventions
- Evidence-based techniques to support student mental and behavioral health
- Strategies to prevent school and community violence
- Evidence-based crisis prevention, response, and recovery efforts
- Developing effective partnerships with community agencies/partners
- Considerations for appropriate lockdown and active assailant drills

Relevant Resources

- PREP@RE Crisis Prevention and Intervention Curriculum <https://www.nasponline.org/professional-development/prepare-training-curriculum>
- Best Practice Considerations for Schools in Active Shooter and Other Armed Assailant Drills <https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources/school-safety-and-crisis/best-practice-considerations-for-schools-in-active-shooter-and-other-armed-assailant-drills>

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT IN SCHOOL SAFETY

Parents are essential partners in their children’s education and provide educators and school leaders with important information, perspective and insight on their children. It is critical that parents have a seat at the table whenever decisions are made that impact their children, particularly on the issues of school safety, support services and discipline. Family engagement efforts should match the needs of the school, students, parents, and the community; provide for equitable participation of all stakeholders; and foster an environment in which parents are valued as essential partners in their children's education, development, and safety.

Action Steps and Recommendations

- Ensure that the school safety and crisis team includes parents who solely represent the parent voice. While other members may also be parents, a parent representative’s sole responsibility is to be an advocate for parents and families on school safety issues.
- Communicate clearly and regularly to all families regarding school safety in languages that are accessible to them. This includes two-way, meaningful communication on the types of safety drills conducted, what students and parents can expect for drills and in the event of an actual emergency, what physical and psychological safety measures are in place, and the role and responsibilities of any type of security personnel on school premises, if applicable.
- Provide specific opportunities for families and community members to learn more about school safety and participate in forums to provide feedback and input on current school safety measures and policies. Events should be held at family-friendly locations, which may not always be the school building, at various dates and times, and accessible to all.
- Distribute information on and connect students and families to the appropriate integrated health and wellness services and specialized instructional support personnel that are available in the school and community. Utilize parent/family liaisons and other community leaders to communicate and reinforce what services and resources are available to students and families.
- Engage and leverage parent and community groups, such as the PTA, to assist in the dissemination of information, planning, and hosting of forums for students and families to offer input and feedback.
- Establish ongoing means for students and parents to provide input on the school environment and demonstrate that their feedback has been considered and/or incorporated into school safety plans, discipline policies, and access to school-based and community support services.

Relevant Resources

- [National Standards for Family-School Partnerships](#), National PTA
- [6 Keys to Engaging Families in ESSA](#), National PTA
- [The Elements of Success: 10 Million Speak on Schools That Work](#), Learning First Alliance

CONCLUSION

Comprehensive school safety is a day-in, day-out commitment that requires on-going collaborative efforts to improve school climate, increase access to comprehensive school mental health services, employ effective discipline, and engage parents and families. This requires high quality district and building level leadership as well as active involvement of school-employed mental health professionals like school psychologists, school counselors, school social workers, and in some districts, school nurses. Every school should be a safe school and we look forward to continuing our work with local, state, and federal leaders to implement effective policy and practice to make this a reality.

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