



Building Safe and Supportive Schools in Virginia

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Violence in Schools: What We Have Learned

School violence is a process, not an event.

- In most school violence cases there were identified social and emotional challenges with the perpetrator.
- These challenges were both school and community based.

Violence in Schools: What We Have Learned

- The pathway for maintaining safe and supportive schools must include both physical and psychological safety for students and staff.
- School safety is more than an issue of technology, it is a process of effectively managing people.

Violence in Schools: What We Have Learned

School safety policies have evolved over the years to provide a more in depth evaluation that moves beyond just the inspection of buildings and grounds. School safety practices now must also focus on the social and emotional welfare of students and staff.

Key Steps to Building Safe and Supportive Schools

1. Implement Multi-tiered Systems of Support

- This process encompasses prevention, wellness promotion and interventions that increase with intensity based on student need and promote close school/community collaboration.

Key Steps to Building Safe and Supportive Schools

- This model also aligns academics, behavioral, social and emotional wellness into a single decision making framework.
- The Virginia Department of Education currently works with fifty-four school divisions across the commonwealth to support the successful implementation of this process.

Key Steps to Building Safe and Supportive Schools

2. Improve Access to School Based Mental Health Supports

- By insuring adequate staffing levels of school employed mental health professionals.
- These trained individuals help infuse prevention and intervention services into the learning process and they provide essential support services to students in need.

School-Employed Mental Health Professionals

- **School Counselors**
 - 1:500 Elementary school
 - 1:400 Middle school
 - 1: 350 High school
- **School Psychologists**
- **School Social Workers**
- **School Nurses**

Other School-Based Supports

- Collaboration with community mental health providers to provide school-based services
 - Therapeutic Day Treatment (TDT) services
 - Substance abuse prevention / intervention

Key Steps to Building Safe and Supportive Schools

- The commonwealth of Virginia is currently investing 10 million dollars in federal grant funding to support mental wellness and to increase access to mental health supports and services for students.

Key Steps to Building Safe and Supportive Schools

These efforts include:

- Expansion of Virginia Tiered Systems of Supports.
- Implementation of Project AWARE – a comprehensive mental health framework piloted in 3 school divisions (Montgomery, Pulaski and Fairfax) and in collaboration with community mental health partners.

Key Steps to Building Safe and Supportive Schools

- Through Project AWARE, over 7,800 students in the three project sites have been linked to a mental health or related service, resource, or support since start of implementation.
- Delivery of Youth Mental Health First Aid: We have trained over 3,300 teachers and other school personnel in 39 school divisions across the commonwealth in this program.

Improving Access to School-Based Mental Health Supports

- Annual Mental Health in Schools Conference
 - Session offerings have included:
 - Applying trauma-informed strategies in schools
 - Suicide prevention, intervention, and post-vention
 - Self-harm, suicide, and social media
 - Restorative practices
 - Collaboration among mental health support staff
 - Suicide risk assessment and threat assessment

Key steps to Building Safe and Supportive Schools

3. Integrate Positive Climate and Campus Safety Efforts

- This Includes:
 - Crisis Prevention
 - Emergency Preparedness
 - Incident Response
 - Incident Recovery

Key steps to Building Safe and Supportive Schools

The Virginia Department of Education is committed to continuing and expanding our collaboration with the Virginia Center for School and Campus Safety to insure this process.

Key steps to Building Safe and Supportive Schools

- In addition we have added two positions in the Office of Student Services for School Safety and Discipline Specialist.

Key Steps to Building Safe and Supportive Schools

4. Balance Physical and Psychological Safety by Providing:

- Reasonable security measures.
- A process to build trusting relationships.
- A pathway to expand student connectedness and involvement.

Key Steps to Building Safe and Supportive Schools

- Provide a clear process to report safety and security concerns.
- Provide an immediate response to all safety concerns.

Suicide Prevention

- The BOE, in cooperation with DBHDS and VDH, provides written guidelines for school personnel on responding to imminent risk for attempting suicide
 - Published in 1999; revised 2003
 - Currently undergoing revision
- Threat Assessment Model Policy, Procedures, and Guidelines
- Training opportunities for school personnel available through VDH Division of Prevention & Health Promotion

Security Equipment Grants

- The Virginia Public School Authority issued \$6.0 million in Notes to fund the School Security Equipment Grants program
 - Awarded on a competitive basis and school divisions are eligible to receive grant awards up to \$100,000.
- 2017-2018 grants:
 - 104 school divisions and three regional educational programs (545 schools)
 - Video monitoring systems, metal detectors, classroom locks, electronic-access controls, visitor-identification systems, direct communications links between schools and law enforcement agencies, and other security upgrades 2018:
- 2018-2019 grants:
 - Application period is currently open and will close on August 1. School divisions will be notified of the 2018-2019 grant awards as soon as they are determined.
 - School divisions submitting applications are required to provide a local match of 25 percent of the grant amount.

Key Steps to Building Safe and Supportive Schools

5. Employ an Effective Positive School Discipline Process

- Discipline process is aligned to efforts that address school safety and climate.
- Is clear, consistent, and equitable.
- Teaches and reinforces appropriate behaviors; is not solely punitive.

Key Steps to Building Safe and Supportive Schools

- The Virginia Board of Education's Student Code of Conduct policy Guidelines is currently undergoing revision to reflect a more proactive and positive approach to school discipline.
- The guidelines will include an Alternatives to Suspension best practice guide.

Key Steps to Building Safe and Supportive Schools

Building safe and supportive schools in Virginia is everyone's responsibility.

Together we can interrupt the process of violence in schools and provide safety for the Commonwealth's greatest resource "Our Children"