



STUDENT SAFETY WORKGROUP RECOMMENDATIONS

OCTOBER 1, 2018

Creating and maintaining a positive school climate is paramount to enhancing student safety. Additionally, updating and implementing physical safety measures and professional trainings is necessary in order to see effective safety practices in all school settings.

Enhance Information-Sharing and Effectiveness of Threat Assessment Teams

1. Enhance reporting of concerning behaviors to threat assessment teams by developing and promoting educational campaigns and trainings that will help school professionals, students, parents and caregivers recognize behaviors that could indicate the potential for self-harm, or harm to others.
 - a. Promote student-driven, peer-to-peer, communication campaigns focusing on suicide prevention, recognizing when a peer may be in need of additional support, and “See Something, Say Something” principles. Particular emphasis should be placed on educating students, parents or caregivers, school professionals and others on how to report information and to whom information should be reported.
 - b. Local school divisions may consider adopting an anonymous reporting mechanism.
 - c. Develop school-appropriate guidance for school, mental health, and law enforcement professionals on which questions should be asked in order to assess a student’s risk-level for harm to self or others.
2. Virginia should dedicate funding to the Virginia Center for School and Campus Safety (the “Center”) to develop cross-disciplinary trainings for schools, law enforcement, and mental health professionals, improve data collection, and enhance information-sharing within the threat assessment team, as well as between threat assessment teams and their partners, including across school divisions.

This funding should be used to:

- a. Provide technical assistance to local school divisions on the school climate survey, school safety audit, threat assessment teams, and other public safety practices.
 - b. Increase the availability of cross-disciplinary threat assessment training for all involved stakeholders (including community mental health partners) that encompasses key principles from each of the disciplines involved in threat assessment.
 - c. Authorize and fund the Center to conduct a single school climate survey in consultation with the Virginia Department of Education (DOE) and the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services (DBHDS) that encompasses safety, education, and health interests. Survey students and staff in secondary schools (Grades 6-12) on an annual basis. This would reduce burden on schools, eliminate duplicative efforts, and provide statewide data to assist schools in addressing school climate issues and better direct their efforts.
3. Enable the Center to adopt and implement a case management tool for threat assessment teams to ensure that schools are able to collect important data, monitor outcomes and track information over time.
 4. Enhance timely notification from law enforcement to schools, and schools to law enforcement when they are aware that a student has experienced, or may experience, a traumatic event in the community.

Role and Prevalence of School Resource Officers (SROs) and School Security Officers (SSOs)

5. Provide additional funding for the School Resource Officer Incentive Grant Program to expand the availability of SROs in schools with the ultimate goal of ensuring that every student has access to an SRO.
6. Require every SRO to receive SRO training approved by the Center within 12 months of employment, and encourage school administrators to attend this training with their assigned SRO. Additional funding should be provided to the Center to implement this recommendation.
7. Require all school divisions employing SROs to have a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the employing law enforcement agency consistent with the Model MOU from the VCSCS. MOUs should be regularly reviewed and updated.
8. Modify the Code of Virginia to allow retired law enforcement officers to be hired as SSOs and still receive retirement benefits.

Suicide Prevention

9. Local school divisions should adopt or develop a standard, school-appropriate, suicide prevention screening tool.
10. Enhance information-sharing among health care professionals about a person’s previous suicide attempt and/or history.
11. Promote statewide educational campaigns on the following topics:
 - a. Suicide prevention, including recognizing signs and identifying opportunities for a person to access help if they, or a loved one are in crisis.
 - b. Campaigns such as “Lock & Talk” that help parents and caregivers understand and address lethal means safety in their homes.
12. Direct VDOE, in consultation with DBHDS and the Center, to update and disseminate the Virginia Suicide Prevention Guidelines to all school divisions in a timely manner. Once updated, direct the agencies to update their model policies, training, and guidance documents to reflect the updated guidelines.
 - a. Updated guidelines should address: suicide prevention and intervention; screening; risk factors; messaging to students, staff, and parents and caregivers about recognizing and reporting behaviors; how and where to report concerning behaviors; engaging students during key transitional periods when data indicate that suicide rates are higher; how to engage students who may be experiencing suicidal thoughts; how to support students returning to school after treatment; postvention; and how to engage with students after a member of their community has died by suicide.

Staffing Levels and Ratios of School Counselors and Support Staff

13. Lower the ratio of school counseling and support staff to students in schools (social workers, psychologists, nurses, behavioral specialists, etc).
 - a. Lower the ratio of school counselors to students in all public schools grades K-12 in a phased roll-out to meet the Virginia Board of Education’s and the American School Counseling Association’s recommendation of 1 to 250.
 - b. The Board of Education should consider increasing the standard of quality (SOQ) regarding the percentage of time school counselors spend providing direct counseling services to students to 80% and eliminate non-counseling activities and tasks.
 - c. Provide school divisions with the flexibility to hire these support positions based on demonstrated need.

14. Increase access to trauma-informed care within schools and communities, and expand access to trauma-informed training for school, mental health, and law enforcement professionals.
 - a. Promote increased access to telehealth services that will enable students to receive access to care during school hours.
 - b. Identify funding streams that may be utilized to achieve this goal.
 - c. Support the placement of behavioral interventionist positions in schools. These positions should promote whole-child education and the social and emotional well-being of all students, but especially our most at-risk students. These roles should serve as an intermediary between classrooms and administration.

Community, School and University Educational Training

15. Increase funding for school-appropriate mental health training for teachers and school professionals consistent with the updated VDOE Suicide Prevention Guidelines, and with particular emphasis on trauma-informed care.
 - a. Encourage school-based professionals to attend trainings in teams.
16. The Virginia Center for School and Campus Safety should develop online training on critical school and student safety issues that can be accessed by teachers (including provisional teachers), law enforcement, and school support staff who may not be able to attend in-person trainings. Training could include cultural competency, supporting special populations, the role of the SSOs/SROs, mental health awareness, Threat Assessment Teams, etc.
 - a. Require at least one school administrator from each school to attend a comprehensive school safety training developed or approved by the Center.
 - b. School divisions may require that teachers participate in certain trainings or modules as part of their in-service or re-certification requirements.
17. Produce state level guidance/best practices on information-sharing between law enforcement, schools, and mental health providers. (FERPA/HIPAA)

Physical Security

18. Direct the Virginia Department of Education to identify opportunities to increase the \$100,000 cap on the School Security Equipment Grants, and expand the existing criteria to include school safety consultants or technical assistance, as well as technological advancements.
 - a. Review the current scoring criteria and whether the current criteria puts primary schools at a disadvantage.

19. Increase transparency and communication with students on safety measures and protocols which a school has put in place. Schools should also strive to include students in conversations about their personal safety and opportunities to enhance existing practices.
20. Encourage school divisions to partner with local law enforcement agencies on general school safety practices, as well as to ensure integration of preparation and response protocols.