

STATE ACTION PLAN FOR SCHOOL SAFETY: 2025

PURPOSE:

To coordinate North Carolina school safety efforts across state government and with communities and schools so that efforts are efficient and effective and undertaken with accountability and shared responsibility.

PARTICIPANTS:

Local Representation / Subject Matter Experts
Task Force for Safer Schools Committees
Center for Safer Schools
Executive Steering Committee on State Action Plan for School Safety
Department of Public Instruction
Department of Health and Human Services
Department of Justice
Department of Public Safety
Stakeholders
Subject Matter Experts
Public

PROCESS:

The process for developing the State Action Plan for School Safety (SAPSS) involves the listed participants; notable in the process are two briefings (October 2019; January 2020) of the Task Force for Safer Schools and substantive review by the Task Force's committees. The Department of Public Safety coordinates the process and is guided by the Executive Steering Committee on SAPSS which has members from all the named state departments, including the Center for Safer Schools, as well as local representatives and subject matter experts.

In addition to attending public meetings of the Task Force for Safer Schools, members of the public helped develop some of the primary sources (listed below) used to generate the SAPSS. Public hearings were held by the NC House Select Committee on School Safety and the Governor's Crime Commission Special Committee on School Shootings. Students, teachers, school

support personnel, school administrators, and parents participated in these hearings. A website with a forum for public comment is being developed to further generate public involvement.

PRIMARY SOURCES USED IN DRAFTING THE STATE ACTION PLAN FOR SCHOOL SAFETY:

Center for Safer Schools reports (2013; 2015)

State School Safety Activity reports (collected quarterly by Department of Public Safety; started in 2018)

North Carolina House Select Committee on School Safety Report (2018)

Governor's Crime Commission Special Committee on School Shootings Report (2018)

Federal Commission on School Safety Report (2018)

SCOPE: PreK-12 schools in North Carolina with a five-year (2020-2025) horizon

GUIDING PRINCIPLES:

1. The safety of our students, teachers, and school staff at PreK-12 schools is our focus.
2. Actions undertaken to make schools safer should be carried out fairly and with a “do no harm” approach.
3. School and communities, often in partnership, have already made our schools safer, and their actions offer starting points from which we can identify additional steps to be planned and implemented over the next five years.
4. Partnership and collaboration at the State level should mirror what is happening in our schools and communities so coordination with transparency, accountability, and good stewardship of resources occurs.
5. A proactive approach to school safety promotes positive learning environments for all students and staff in all schools and classrooms across North Carolina.
6. Prevention defines our overarching philosophy as we recognize that violence in our schools exists on a continuum with disciplinary problems often serving as precursors to more violent incidents.
7. Protection, response, and recovery plans and efforts already exist in many schools and communities, and the State should be positioned to assist with the further development and implementation of these plans and efforts when needed.

- 8. Data-driven decisions and evidence-based practices should characterize school safety efforts so that all schools are safe for everyone, and the vision of this Action Plan is realized.

VISION: Through a whole of community approach, every school in North Carolina will be a safe school where all students can learn, all teachers can teach, and all school staff can do their work without any concerns for their well-being.

GOAL 1: Promote Positive Learning Environments

OBJECTIVE 1.1: Foster a positive climate

Initiatives
1.1.1 Support LEAs in their development policies and procedures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and future communicable diseases by continuing to integrate the newest evidence in the public health guidance, such as the StrongSchools NC toolkit, and sharing PPE with K-12 school staff, teachers, and students.
1.1.2 Support the ongoing implementation of the Hope4Healers Helpline to serve teachers, school personnel and their families. The Helpline will connect educators and school staff with a licensed mental health professional to provide support, as our school personnel work through in an unprecedented situation.
1.1.3 Empower students to be part of the solution by creating positive change through actionable involvement in school safety conversations, planning, and training design; level of involvement to be determined by the appropriateness of age/grade.
1.1.4 Promote evidence-based programs that emphasize character education as part of school violence prevention efforts.
1.1.5 Provide evidence-based resources and technical assistance for schools to create a positive school climate and culture of connectedness.
1.1.6 Adopt evidence-based, universal social and emotional learning (SEL) strategies that promote cognitive and socioemotional development and increase connectedness to schools and peers, beginning at the pre-K and Kindergarten levels and continuing each year through at least elementary and middle school.
1.1.7 Encourage the use a variety of data sources, from the community and within the school, including school climate surveys and Youth Risk Behavior Surveys, to determine the specific needs of the school and the community environmental factors that affect student learning capacity.
1.1.8 Use comprehensive social and emotional learning strategies to strengthen student skills regarding appropriate media resource/outlet use, including the ability to recognize and report cyberbullying. Adopt policies, such as school climate initiatives, support for digital citizenship and character development, as additional preventative efforts. Consider ways for students to lead efforts, when appropriate, to address the importance of peer influence. Use appropriate systems to monitor social media and mechanisms for reporting cyberbullying incidents.

1.1.9 Continue to educate local schools and school systems regarding the harmful impacts of bullying; seek evidence-based solutions for bullying prevention.
1.1.10 Facilitate the presence of more adult role models at local schools. Promote family/community engagement and volunteer programs.

OBJECTIVE 1.2: Implement effective strategies to address student misconduct and connect at-risk youth with appropriate services

Initiatives
1.2.1 Engage professionals from various disciplines (law, education, social work, mental health) to develop a best practices model for distinguishing the difference between harmful behavior and high-risk conduct. Include results as a part of SRO training and training of educators.
1.2.2 Convene stakeholders from each jurisdiction for dialogue about how to partner and cooperate to address the “school-to-prison pipeline.”
1.2.3 Adopt tiered social, emotional, and behavioral supports to establish a climate that appropriately supports and responds to student behavior.
1.2.4 Encourage schools to put in place more effective alternatives to suspension
1.2.5 Empower local youth violence prevention planning bodies to integrate services through collaboration and to use mixed funding streams.
1.2.6 Work to expand training resources for court counselors and community program providers/staff in areas related to school safety. For court staff, develop specialized training modules on the recognition and reporting of risk behaviors and warning signs that could lead to school violence; actively engage court counselors in student support teams throughout the state.
1.2.7 Continue to educate police chiefs, sheriffs, LME-MCOs, and other local entities as to the benefits of CIT and how various sites are identifying resources for the training and materials, as well as provide technical assistance regarding best practices for implementing CIT programs.
1.2.8 Continue to increase the number of beds and services for youth at crisis and assessment centers, which can better assess a child's needs and create smoother transitions back into schools and communities.

GOAL 2: Prevent Incidents of School Violence from Occurring

OBJECTIVE 2.1: Encourage information sharing and the use of best practices

Initiatives
2.1.1 Improve school violence incident data collection and data sharing so that education and law enforcement officials at the state level have a consistent set of definitions and data to use as they work together on future safe school efforts. Explore incorporating “averted school violence incident” data into reporting to identify prevention strategies that work in North Carolina.
2.1.2 Develop a public education campaign that educates about the importance of safe firearm storage.
2.1.3 Produce an Annual Report on School Safety in North Carolina.
2.1.4 Maintain a web-based resource center of current funding sources available to schools for school safety initiatives.
2.1.5 Serve as a repository for best practices and provide information and technical assistance to schools and the general public.
2.1.6 Encourage and recognize the implementation of school safety best practices by creating a safe school certification program for schools that meet certain safety requirements, such as creating emergency plans and holding emergency drills. Encourage LEAs to update or create drills that can be conducted safely while meeting the public health requirements in place as a result of COVID-19.
2.1.7 Collaboratively conduct at the state level regular reviews of policy making, legislative documents, and activities related to school safety.

OBJECTIVE 2.2: Expand access to mental and behavioral health resources for students

Initiatives
2.2.1 Support additional funding for Specialized Instructional Support Personnel (SISP) that provide student mental health support in schools and encourage training about SISP roles for those who interact with them in schools.
2.2.2 Increase student awareness of mental health, how to support self-wellness, and how to seek care by strengthening implementation and integration of NC Standard Course of Study Healthful Living Mental and Emotional Health Standards and Guidance Socio-Emotional Essential Standards into content areas of instruction and supporting the use of Signs of Suicide in schools.
2.2.3 Provide coordination of Youth Mental Health First Aid training for adults who interact with children to recognize signs and symptoms of mental illness (mental health literacy).
2.2.4 Support standardized uniform training for all Specialized Instructional Support Personnel (SISP) to help protect the physical and mental health at schools during the pandemic and take on additional tasks such as a screening students for COVID-19 symptoms.
2.2.5 Develop and implement comprehensive and coordinated approaches that are inclusive of all systems involved in service provision. Foster broader training and implementation of System of Care throughout North Carolina.

<p>2.2.6 With the increased use of remote learning during the pandemic, promote the utilization of technology, including tele-mental health, to increase access to services in particularly for underserved/rural areas (specific actions can include evaluate the possibility and feasibility of providing consultation support to school-based health centers and schools to further support mental health care access for children and adolescents).</p>
<p>2.2.7 Promote and build capacity for screening and early intervention for mental/substance use disorders in all settings by increasing education and awareness of the importance of these services, by supporting the use of evidence-based screening tools and instruments, and by identifying existing resources in all communities to meet the identified needs.</p>

OBJECTIVE 2.3: Improve reporting and assessment of concerning behavior and suspicious activity

Initiatives
<p>2.3.1 Establish multidisciplinary Threat Assessment Teams (TATs) consisting of highly trained school professionals and certified personnel from a variety of different disciplines. Encourage connecting to treatment and ensuring involvement with behavioral health providers for school threat assessment teams.</p>
<p>2.3.2 Develop NC specific threat assessment guide which includes resources and model policies.</p>
<p>2.3.3 Develop and provide a comprehensive screening tool to be used by school threat assessment teams to evaluate students on an individual basis and allow schools to take personalized preventive action.</p>
<p>2.3.4 Establish comprehensive targeted violence prevention programs supported by multi-disciplinary threat assessment teams as outlined in the U.S. Secret Service guide, Enhancing School Safety Using a Threat Assessment Model: An Operational Guide for Preventing Targeted School Violence.</p>

GOAL 3: Protect Students, Teachers, and Staff from Incidents of School Violence

OBJECTIVE 3.1: Enhance physical security and reduce unauthorized access to school campuses

Initiatives
<p>3.1.1 Continue development of a facility vulnerability assessment tool for use by school districts.</p>
<p>3.1.2 Explore current practices involving Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) in the construction of schools that are being built or renovated. Consider the development of code specifications that recognize a “security certification” for schools that meet certain requirements.</p>
<p>3.1.3 Provide schools with model policies for conducting searches for weapons and drugs</p>

3.1.4 Improve school bus safety.

OBJECTIVE 3.2: Ensure school resource officers (SROs) are equipped with the knowledge and resources to meet the needs of the schools to which they are assigned

Initiatives
3.2.1 Continue to enhance SRO training with Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) training as described by the NC School Boards Association (NCSBA). Recommend that NCSBA work with the NC Justice Academy to develop strategy so it is taught as part of SRO training. NOTE: Generating awareness and understanding of Health Information Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) in SRO training should also take place per DHHS input.
3.2.2 Implement a robust “school-to-prison pipeline” education program within the School Resource Officer (SRO) curriculum that addresses how exclusionary discipline practices disproportionately impact youth of color nationally and in North Carolina, the overrepresentation of youth of color in the criminal justice system, and the SRO role in effectively impacting these injustices to yield positive outcomes for the juvenile and community.
3.2.3 Update School Resource Officer training with the following topics: mental health, cultural competency, disability awareness, trauma, and building relationships/interacting with students.
3.2.4 Revise the Basic School Resource Officer training to include updated topics on de-escalation, procedural justice, explicit and implicit biases training, and ethical and effective problem-solving.
3.2.5 Improve the annual census of School Resource Officers so that schools and law enforcement coordinate their responses and address funding, assignment to schools /assignment sharing, and appropriate law enforcement agency designation.

OBJECTIVE 3.3: Foster positive relationships and improve information sharing between schools and law enforcement

Initiatives
3.3.1 Support FERPA training for all school and law enforcement personnel per suggestions offered by the NC School Boards Association. Include a component of parental/family awareness regarding FERPA and its exceptions.
3.3.2 Improve information sharing within the interpretation of FERPA and HIPAA guidelines to allow sharing of critical information with agencies that have jurisdiction over programs that can be beneficial to our children. This can include, but is not limited to, additional training as well as the improved sharing of information and data from school to school and the court system to the schools.

3.3.3 Recommend that SRO programs operate with current signed memoranda of understanding (MOUs) that are based on model MOUs. Such MOUs should delineate the roles and responsibilities of school personnel and SROs as they work together; specify to the extent possible the fine line that separates school discipline from statute enforcement and who has responsibility for each in school settings; and address SRO equipment needs especially given the continuing challenges with communications equipment, which need to be addressed through funding, training, and school building renovations.
3.3.4 Ensure that school administrators and staff are trained on the proper role of SROs, including how to work collaboratively with them.
3.3.5 Encourage law enforcement officers to maintain high visibility around schools through safety checks, cultivate relationships with school personnel and students, and share with school personnel information regarding school security issues.
3.3.6 Encourage both school administrators and law enforcement to review and implement the recommendations outlined by the Task Force for Racial Equity in Criminal Justice that focus on building positive relationships between schools and law enforcement.
3.3.7 Annually SROs should meet with juvenile court counselling staff from their jurisdiction to review data on the number of school-based offenses being filed and how alternatives to criminal justice involvement can be explored in their community. (New Initiative from Juv Justice)

GOAL 4: Strengthen Capability for Effective Responses to Incidents of School Violence

OBJECTIVE 4.1: Decrease the time it takes for responders to arrive on scene

Initiatives
4.1.1 Enhance law enforcement training to reflect best practices and prepare law enforcement for immediate “no wait” active shooter response. This includes single responder to active shooter incident.
4.1.2 Expand emergency response capacities in rural areas to address minimal law enforcement coverage and longer response times during an incident.
4.1.3 Implement a statewide panic alarm solution.

OBJECTIVE 4.2: Implement active shooter preparedness and mitigation initiatives for school personnel

Initiatives
4.2.1 Study requiring basic school security and/or active shooter preparedness training as part of the state’s teacher certification requirements.

4.2.2 Determine if all schools are conducting active shooter training and exercises for staff on a recurring basis as well as age-appropriate active shooter training for students.

4.2.3 Assess school response capabilities and mitigation strategies to determine training and resource needs.

OBJECTIVE 4.3: Strengthen coordination between schools and responders

Initiatives
4.3.1 Train SROs to instruct students and school personnel how to respond (run, hide, fight) in an active shooter crisis and strategies to implement as the initial responders to help mitigate casualties.
4.3.2 Develop guidance about active shooter drills with emphasis placed upon the involvement of all local entities who would respond to an incident: local schools, law enforcement agencies, and emergency responders. Include information about the incident command system approach as well as instructions for monitoring and reporting drills.
4.3.3 Continue to conduct outreach, train, and educate schools about the School Risk Management Planning application.
4.3.4 Conduct a needs assessment to determine what is needed to ensure interoperability of local law enforcement and school communications equipment.

GOAL 5: Build Capacity and Readiness for Recovery from Incidents of School Violence

OBJECTIVE 5.1: Be prepared to restore services and return to normal or pre-event status after an incident occurs

Initiatives
5.1.1 Develop guidance on communications during emergencies with specific attention paid to minimizing trauma.
5.1.2 Enhance school personnel and parental knowledge about the role of trauma in the psychological, physical, and social growth of children.
5.1.3 Develop guidance based in best practices for how to conduct after action assessments, develop after action reports, and undertake corrective action planning.

