

# Improving School Safety

Annual Meeting  
November 16, 2018

# Overview

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- A broad range of K-12 education issues continue to focus state and local attention, including: equity, teacher shortages, facilities, early childhood, special education, high school innovation, and **school safety**.
- **Virginia established a Center for School Safety in 2000. There was a Task Force in 2013 that made a range of changes. Now in 2018, various groups have again taken an updated look at improving school safety.**
- **Going forward, Virginia will have to continue to consider relative costs of additional prevention and response initiatives.**
  - Options/recommendations that will be before the 2019 General Assembly vary in approach and in costs.

# Today's Panel

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- Overview, Panel Introductions, and Potential Options  
*Sarah Herzog, Senate Finance Committee Staff*
- Legislative History, SROs and SSOs, Threat Assessments, Safety Audits, School Climate Survey, and Training  
*Donna Michaelis*  
*Director, Virginia Center for School and Campus Safety*
- Local School Division Perspective and Experience  
*Dr. Aaron Spence*  
*Superintendent, Virginia Beach City Public Schools*
- Q & A

## Donna Michaelis, Director, Va. Center for School & Campus Safety

Mrs. Michaelis is the manager of the Virginia Center for School and Campus Safety and Public Safety Training at the Department of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS). She has been working in the area of school safety since 1985 when she began her career with the Chesterfield County Police Department as the county's first Child Safety Coordinator.

Mrs. Michaelis assumed the responsibility of the newly legislated Center at DCJS when it was established in 2000 as a result of the Columbine tragedy. She is currently a manager within the Law Enforcement Division of DCJS overseeing Public Safety Training and the Virginia Center for School and Campus Safety. In her role, she provides training, resources, and technical assistance to all schools, colleges and universities, and law enforcement agencies across the Commonwealth on issues related to school and campus safety and specialized law enforcement issues.

Mrs. Michaelis is a graduate of the College of William and Mary.



## Dr. Aaron Spence, Superintendent, Virginia Beach City Public Schools

Dr. Spence assumed the leadership of Virginia Beach City Public Schools (VBCPS) June 23, 2014. As superintendent, he oversees the operation of 86 schools (serving almost 69,000 students) as well as all administrative support functions for the school division. Dr. Spence is a proud graduate of Green Run High School in Virginia Beach.

He returned to Virginia from having served most recently as superintendent of Moore County Public Schools in North Carolina. Before his service in Moore County, Dr. Spence was chief high school officer of the Houston Independent School District (HISD), the eighth largest school district in the country.

Dr. Spence began his career in Virginia as a French teacher and photojournalism teacher. Prior to leaving Virginia, he served as an assistant principal and later as a principal in Henrico County Public Schools. He also served as Chief Academic Officer and Director of Curriculum and Instruction for Chesterfield County Public Schools.



# JLARC Found Comparison to Other States Did Not Reveal Any Significant Shortcomings; Some Approaches May Be Worth Considering

## Key takeaways

- No single approach has proven to be completely effective at preventing & responding to school shootings
- Other states use multiple approaches, many of which Virginia also uses
- Comparison of Virginia to other states did not reveal any significant shortcomings in Virginia
- Some states' approaches may be worth exploring further

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JOINT LEGISLATIVE AUDIT  
AND REVIEW COMMISSION

September 2018



**School safety: Other states' approaches to preventing & responding to school shootings**

Education Subcommittee,  
Senate Finance Committee

# Key Approaches Used by States Encompass Student Behavior, Interventions, and Emergency Personnel/Preparedness

Category	Approach	Other states?
Prevention	Measuring & improving school climate	Some
	Threat assessment	Some
	Tip lines/smartphone apps	Some
Planning & personnel	School safety plans	Many
	School safety coordinators	Few
	School resource officers	Many
Facilities & testing	Physical security measures	Many
	Safety audits	Many
	Response drills	Many

Source: Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission (JLARC) briefing to the Education Subcommittee of Senate Finance, September 20, 2018.

# Prevention: Virginia Has Been a National Leader in Threat Assessment and in Measuring School Climate (2:15 video clip)

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How Schools Should Respond to a Student's Threats

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rRi\\_eiHe1sw&t=6s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rRi_eiHe1sw&t=6s)



# JLARC's Takeaways for Consideration

## Lay Groundwork for Development of Any Recommendations

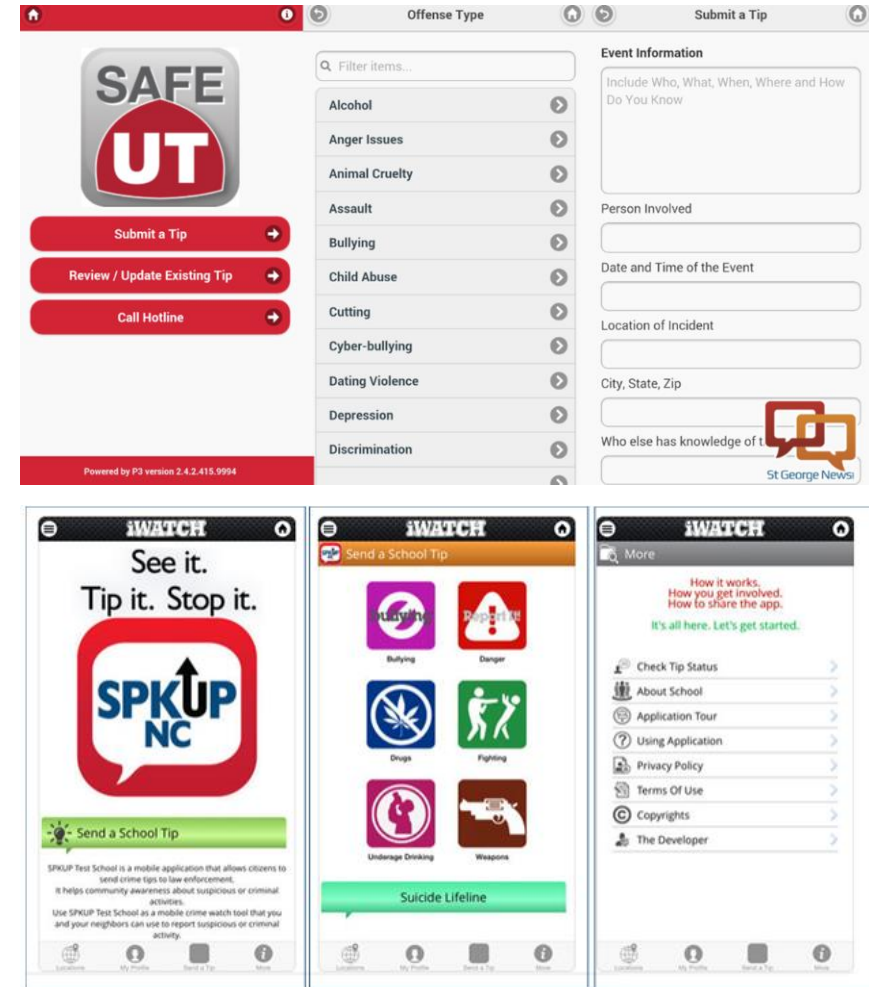
School climate	Assess state-level responsibilities to measure and consider proven school climate improvement strategies (e.g. mental health counselors)
Threat assessment	Continue improvements to training and clarify implementation (threat to others vs. threat to self only)
Smartphone app	Examine adequacy, awareness, and usage among K-12 students
Personnel	Provide additional or enhanced training (e.g. mental health) for SROs and others responsible for school safety; assess need for additional clarity about school staff responsible for school safety; ensure MOU to define SRO role
Safety plans	Assess quality and ensure involvement and electronic access by first responders
Safety audits	Consider periodically conducting random school safety audits by external group (rather than self-audits)
Response drills	Provide additional guidance and/or consider testing different approaches to response drills



# Prevention:

## Virginia Does Not Have a Statewide School-Specific Tip Line

- Virginia participates in a smartphone reporting system called *See Something, Send Something*. It is not school specific and is not widely promoted in schools.
- Feasibility of a statewide school-specific app.
  - Utah's SafeUT Crisis Text and Tip Line is a statewide service that provides real-time crisis intervention through texting and a mobile app for confidential tips.
  - North Carolina is piloting an app that allows anonymous tips about school safety concerns.



## Other Recent Reviews of Current Practices and Opportunities for Improvement

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- Children's Cabinet Student Safety Work Group Final Report and Recommendations (October 15, 2018); 20 recommendations.
  - **Enhance Information-Sharing and Effectiveness of Threat Assessment Teams**
  - **Role and Prevalence of SROs and SSOs**
  - **Suicide Prevention**
  - **Staffing Levels and Ratios of School Counselors and Support Staff**
  - **Community, School and University Educational Training**
  - **Physical Security**
- House Select Committee on School Safety (final meetings on November 14, 2018 and December 11, 2018)
  - **Prevention & Response Protocol Subcommittee**
    - 18 potential recommendations
  - **Student Behavior & Interventions Subcommittee**
    - 24 potential recommendations
  - **Infrastructure & Security Subcommittee**
    - 16 potential recommendations

# Current Related Budget Items Are In Three Secretariats

## Education:

### Direct Aid to Public Education

- **SOQ staffing counselors:** State support of \$114 million for 2,990 funded school counselor positions (out of 3,890 actual positions)
- **Security equipment grants:** \$6 million annually (up to \$100,000 per school division per year; 25% match)

## Public Safety:

### Criminal Justices Services

- **School Resource Officers (SROs)/School Security Officers (SSOs) Incentive Grant:** \$1.3 million GF per year (Bumped up to \$2.6 million in FY 2019); In FY 2019, 38 localities received grants (most middle and high schools have SROs, about 1/3 of elementary schools)
- **Virginia Center for School and Campus Safety:** \$410,877 GF

## Health & Human Resources:

### Children's Behavioral Health

- **DBHDS:** CSBs, federal mental health block grant, federal substance abuse, prevention and treatment block grant (suicide prevention, mental health first aid training)
- **Virginia Medicaid Program**
- **Children's Services Act** services for children with emotional and behavioral challenges and their families

# Universe of Possible Options Range Widely in Cost, Cost/Benefit

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- School counselors (i.e. reduce ratio to 1:250 students, phased over 3 years = \$36M)
- Ballistic barriers and/or other facilities/infrastructure/products
- Others

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- Web-based anonymous tip app, with crisis intervention services
- School climate survey
- Additional state support for security equipment grants; SROs
- Others

Little to  
No Cost

- More and/or refined training
- De-couple threat to others assessment from threat to self procedures
- Others

# Questions

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- What is Virginia doing well in improving school safety, and what could be refined?
- **Are there any key gaps in Virginia? What is the evidence base?**
  - How do we find the right balance between focusing on prevention and response?
  - Are there unintended consequences of some approaches? Are there related positive effects (suicide prevention, updated facility needs, academic improvement)?

# 2019 Session Potential Options

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- Anonymous tipline/app with crisis intervention services
- School counselors, other Mental Health in schools
- Prevention-focused training
- Training in information sharing with police and schools (i.e. FERPA release when substantive threat would constitute a health and safety emergency)
- Require MOUs to define SRO role
- Define school emergency manager position responsibilities and training
- External check of self-audits
- Local needs assessments
- Others