



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

Information collected

- Other states' approaches
 - Interviews
 - State statutes, documents & reports
- General research
 - Academic literature
 - National reports
- Short-term review, less depth than a JLARC study

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

JLARC identified 9 school safety approaches used by other states to varying degrees

Category	Approach	Other states?
Prevention	Measuring & improving school climate	Some
	Threat assessment	Some
	Tips 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

Agenda

Section	Topic
Prevention	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Measuring & improving school climate• Threat assessment• Tip lines / smartphone apps
Planning & personnel	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• School safety plans• School safety coordinators• School resource officers
Facilities & testing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Physical security measures• Safety audits• Response drills

School climate: “Quality and character of school life”

- Few states systematically measure school climate statewide, but almost all said positive school climate improves safety
- Usually measured by a survey of students and staff
- Virginia has been measuring school climate statewide since 2013

Positive school climate may reduce the likelihood of school violence

- Research: Positive school climate is associated with lower rates of bullying, fighting, weapon carrying, suicidal thoughts among students
- Positive school climate is also associated with
 - Better academic performance
 - Reduced suspensions and truancy
 - Improved student mental health
 - Improved teacher morale

Virginia's teachers and students generally view school climate as positive, but concerns exist

- Virginia: 80% of middle school students felt positive about their school and felt safe (2017)
- But one-third of students said someone at school physically attacked, pushed, or hit them
- Teachers also felt positive, except about discipline
- Principals report using the results of school climate surveys

Threat assessment: A structured process to evaluate and address identified threats of violence

- Goal: to assess the credibility and severity of a threat of violence
- Conducted by a school-based team with complementary expertise
- FBI and the U.S. Secret Service recommend as the main strategy to prevent violent attacks in schools
- Prevention, not prediction

SOURCE: U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2000; U.S. Secret Service and Department of Education, 2004.

Virginia is a leader in threat assessment

- Virginia field tested threat assessment in 35 schools a few years after the 2000 FBI report
- Virginia was first state to require threat assessment teams in every K-12 school
- Few states have an established statewide school threat assessment process, but some are working on it

Two-thirds of Virginia schools conducted threat assessments (2016-2017)

- 9,238 assessments conducted
 - 50% involved threats to harm self only
 - 10% were classified at the highest threat level
 - 0.5% (40 incidents) were highest threat level
- Threat assessment may not be the best approach to investigate threats to harm self only

Tip lines or apps to report school safety threats

- Reporting via text messages, toll-free hotlines, voicemail, email, smartphone apps
- Information routed through law enforcement, state homeland security or school administrators
- Students often have advance knowledge about incidents

Many states have tip lines; awareness in Virginia is unclear

- Several states (CO, OH, NC) have anonymous tip lines focused specifically on school safety
 - “Safe2Tell” (CO) received 9,000+ tips last year
- Virginia uses “See Something, Send Something” app
 - Not exclusive to school safety
 - Tips go to Virginia State Police
 - Awareness of the app among K-12 students and staff is unclear

Agenda

Section	Topic
Prevention	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Measuring & improving school climate• Threat assessment• Tip lines / smartphone apps
Planning & personnel	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• School safety plans• School safety coordinators• School resource officers
Facilities & testing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Physical security measures• Safety audits• Response drills

School safety plans: Detailed document governing school responses to a variety of emergencies

- Ideally contains procedures to follow before, during, and after crisis or emergency
 - provisions for staff training to implement plan
 - available electronically (including school layout)
- Virginia law requires each school to have safety plan
- Some Virginia schools report needing more training on plans or lack first responder access to school layout
- Many states require schools to have school safety plans, but practices vary

Sometimes referred to as emergency operations plan or multi-hazard plan.

Safety coordinators and specialists: Accountable for all school safety planning, staffing, and activity

- Several states (IN, NJ, TN) use coordinators or specialists
 - Responsible for developing and maintaining safety plan
 - Must be trained, and then provide training as needed to other school staff
- Virginia school divisions required to appoint emergency manager, but responsibilities and training not defined

School resource officers (SROs): Sworn or certified law enforcement assigned to a school

- Engage in community policing to create safe environment and are authorized to carry a firearm
 - Safety expert, law enforcer, and first responder
 - Student mentor and informal counselor
 - Liaison between school and public safety agencies
- Majority of schools across Virginia have SROs (2017)
 - 53% of public schools (vs. 42% nationwide)
 - 76% of secondary schools (vs. 58% nationwide)
- Most other states authorize the use of SROs

SROs increase the perception of safety in Virginia; may need more definition of role and training

- Majority of teachers and students said SRO made them feel safer at school (VA school climate survey)
- Not all Virginia schools (83%) reported using an MOU to define roles and responsibilities of the SRO, school division, and law enforcement agencies
- Majority of SROs report needing additional training for working with students with special needs and mental health issues, and dangerous students

Agenda

Section	Topic
Prevention	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Measuring & improving school climate• Threat assessment• Tip lines / smartphone apps
Planning & personnel	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• School safety plans• School safety coordinators• School resource officers
Facilities & testing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Physical security measures• Safety audits• Response drills

Physical security measures: States typically have a minimal role in physical security in schools

- School divisions, rather than states, tend to determine building design and use of physical security measures
- State role in physical security is often limited
- State funding of physical security is usually minimal or periodic

In Virginia, state provides some funding for security measures

- Funding for facilities is primarily a local responsibility
- Since 2013, Virginia has been awarding divisions grants for school security equipment
- For 2018-2019, Virginia school divisions applied for up to \$100,000 in grants (\$6 million total) to be used for “qualified security equipment” such as
 - Intercom systems, two-way radios
 - Surveillance cameras, security scanning equipment

In May, 2018, the Virginia Public School Authority issued \$6 million in debt to fund the School Security Equipment Grants program for 2018-2019.

Some physical security measures are increasingly common in VA and other states

- Identification cards or processes
- Locking & monitoring doors
- Staff communication technology
- Alarms and emergency alerts

SOURCE: What Can Be Done About School Shootings? A Review of the Evidence, Borum, Randy, Cornell, Modzeleski, Jimerson, 2010; The Role of Technology in Improving K-12 School Safety, Rand Corporation, 2016.

Video surveillance is somewhat prevalent; metal detectors are far less prevalent in other states

Physical security measure	Estimated prevalence in public schools
Video surveillance and cameras	≈60%
Metal detectors (required walk-through)	≈5%
Metal detectors (handheld, random)	≈3%

SOURCE: The Role of Technology in Improving K-12 School Safety, Rand Corporation, 2016.

Some low-cost security measures are not harmful to school climate, but may not be fully effective

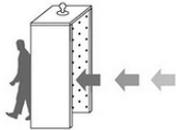
	Security measure	Strengths & weaknesses
	Access controls (locked doors, ID cards)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Strongly recommended to prevent unauthorized access• Not completely effective because shooter often is a student who has access to building
	Surveillance cameras	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Shown to deter property crimes, theft, and violence• May be helpful during response• No evidence that deters school shooters
	Emergency alerts	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Effective method of simultaneously alerting all students• Can be ignored if overused
	Two-way communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Helps school staff communicate during incident• Especially useful if coordinated with law enforcement and helpful during response

SOURCE: Academic research.

Metal detectors are more costly and can harm school climate, but can be somewhat effective

Security measure Strengths & weaknesses

Metal detectors
(Fixed, always)



- Found to be effective at detecting knives and guns
- Can be harmful to school climate and can create logistical challenges and delays
- Not always effective
(Example, Minnesota, 2005: Student arrived at school with gun, shot staff operating metal detectors, then proceeded into school.)

Metal detectors
(Hand-held, random)



- Found to be effective at detecting knives and guns
- May be less harmful to school climate and less logistically challenging than fixed metal detectors
- Less effective than fixed metal detectors, but can have a deterrent effect due to random nature and mobility

Safety audits: Identify ways to improve school safety

- Can be used to assess multiple aspects of school safety
 - Physical safety of school buildings and grounds
 - Safety plans, policies, procedures
 - School climate (perceptions about safety)
 - Capacity or resources for safety and security

All Virginia school divisions must have safety audit committee to perform annual safety audits

- Specific audit requirements for each school
 - Review safety plan (annual)
 - Survey students, staff on climate & safety (annual)
 - Audit facility site using safety checklist (tri-annual)
- Audit committee reviews audit documents and develops written assessment* of safety conditions in each school
 - Submitted to school division superintendent, who provides required information to DCJS

*Should identify physical safety and student safety concerns, and recommend solutions.

Many states primarily rely on “self-audits” by school staff, though several states do their own audits

- Many states require self-audits
- Some states (KY, NE, TN, NM) have state entity or consultant conduct audits, rather than rely on self-audits
- Using non-school staff to conduct audits require additional funding for staffing & travel
 - To reduce costs, some states hire part-time safety auditors (who are often former law enforcement officers or school staff)

Response drills: School shooter response drills are increasingly common

- Common for schools in Virginia and nationwide to conduct drills for variety of purposes
 - Fire
 - Tornado and other inclement weather
 - Lockdown
- More schools report conducting active shooter response drills

Many other states have response drills of some kind

- Many states have response drills
- Response drills should be governed by a clear plan
- Several states are taking interesting approaches
 - Kentucky
 - New Jersey

Virginia schools are required to conduct lockdown drills

- Required in Virginia law as of 2013
- In 2017, five school divisions reported the need to
 - Improve and increase lockdown drills and fire drills
 - Increase coordination with local law enforcement
- Additional guidance about frequency and approach to safety drills could be helpful

SOURCE: Virginia School Safety Audit Survey Results, DCJS, 2017.

Key takeaways

- No approach proven to be completely effective
- 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

Key takeaways (continued)

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

Attachment: Additional detail on other states

Many states require schools to have school safety plans, but practices vary

Practice	States
Require collaboration with local police, fire, rescue, or other community partners to develop plans	19 states AL, AK, AZ, CA, CT, CO, DE, GA, LA, MA, MN, NC, NH, NV, NY, OH, RI, TN, WV
Require plans to be submitted for review to state school safety center, department of education, & police	3 states IN, OH, MD
Make plans available online to first responders and school officials	6 states AZ, NY, OH, TN, MD, NC

Most states authorize the use of SROs

- SROs authorized in at least 36 states, but use is typically a local decision
- Some states also require training and MOUs
 - At least 9 states require specialized training (CO, FL, GA, IN, MD, MO, NJ, TN, & TX)
 - At least 5 states require MOU to define operation, supervision, funding, & training (FL, IN, MD, MO, & TN)

State funding of physical security is usually minimal or periodic

- Some states reported providing minimal or no funds to school divisions for physical security (e.g., AZ and NE)
- Some states provide one-time capital funding to offset cost of improving physical security

State	Estimated \$
Florida	\$99 million
Colorado	\$30 million - \$80 million
Maryland	\$20 million
Georgia	\$16 million
Connecticut	\$15 million
New Mexico	\$10 million

Some states provide loans or allow localities to raise local revenue

State	Funding type / description	Estimated \$
Indiana	Subsidized loan (1% to 4% interest over 10 years)	\$35 million
Ohio	Authorized districts to assign levies for purpose of improving school safety (Citizens in one district voted for a levy, citizens in another district voted against it)	Various

At least 26 other states perform school safety audits; most commonly “facility audits”

Audit approach	States
General school safety audit	26 states AZ, CO, CT, FL, ID, IL, IA, KY, LA, MD, MN, MT, NV, NH, NJ, NM, NY, ND, OH, OR, SC, SD, TN, TX, UT, WY
Audit of facility site (physical safety of school building & grounds)	16 states AZ, CO, FL, ID, IL, KY, MD, MN, MT, NV, NM, NY, ND, OR, SD, TN

SOURCE: REMS Technical Assistance Center.

Response drills should be governed by a clear plan, but states take different approaches

- Purpose of drill is to ensure response is consistent with plan

State	Number and type of drills
Maryland	6 drills (lockdown, shelter in place, evacuation, fire)
New Jersey	2 active shooter drills (in addition to monthly lockdown and regular fire drills)
New York	4 lockdown drills
North Carolina	1 lockdown
Pennsylvania	Various (severe weather, emergency bus evacuation, monthly fire drill – some schools are replacing fire drill with active shooter or lockdown drills)

Examples of notable drill approaches in other states

State	Approach to school shooter drills
Kentucky	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Recently focusing on “situational awareness” due to many different ways an incident can unfold• During a drill, a principal might ask students to find the closest exit and leave as orderly as they can
New Jersey	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Requirement to have at least 2 active shooter drills per year• Random drills, observed by school safety center staff; local law enforcement can be present• Compare response during drill to what is called for in school security plan• Goal is to provide feedback, improve plan and response as necessary