



## **Model Standards for Statewide School Safety Centers**

*(Developed by a working group comprised of state members of the National School Safety Alliance, with input from the general membership of the Alliance, January – June, 2018. These standards are guidelines only and are intended to serve as a “target” for states considering developing a state level school safety center, or for states already with one or more Centers, as a measurement guide, when evaluating existing programs. These standards are not all inclusive, and not intended to create any expectation for any School Safety Center to meet any part or all of these guidelines.)*

### **1. Vision Statement**

- Focus on the whole child
- Comprehensive, yet flexible, framework
  - Recognize individual capabilities and uniqueness of each state
- Whole community approach
  - Leverage partnerships with federal, state, local and other community stakeholders

Creating safe, orderly, and welcoming learning environments is critical to educating and preparing all children and youth to achieve their highest potential so they may fully contribute to society. While everyone shares this responsibility, state-level school safety centers are in a unique position to provide leadership and facilitate an effective and comprehensive network for school safety that both serves the needs of local communities, as well as informs elected and appointed leaders at all levels with relevant information regarding critical school safety issues.

### **2. Goals of Statewide School Safety Centers**

- Address the cycle of prevention, protection, mitigation, response and recovery
- Provide a sustainable strategy for school safety and security
- Establish a user-friendly, interstate framework that allows for statewide variations in policies, laws, capabilities and funding
- Support a consistent, comprehensive information sharing network that facilitates two-way communications between local school stakeholders and national school safety partners
- Promote attitudes, policies and trainings that build resiliency among students and staff and within all schools in the Nation

A comprehensive school safety framework must be inclusive of all aspects of school safety, including: prevention, protection, mitigation, response and recovery, while taking into consideration differences in each state’s capabilities, laws and resources. The framework should also be flexible, practical, affordable and sustainable. In the short-term, a comprehensive school safety network must allow individual districts and schools to first understand and identify their safety needs and then effectively access the “best solutions” to meet those needs.

Because diverse school safety threats and concerns exist (e.g., interpersonal violence, victimization, bullying, suicide, cyber/IT security vulnerabilities, Internet safety risk, natural disasters, etc.), an array of interventions or programs in any given area may be available as potential solutions. In the long-term, a comprehensive framework may provide a methodology to evaluate new and emerging tools, technologies and evidence-driven best practices to ensure stakeholders have the resources and tools needed to provide safe and secure school environments.

Any comprehensive school safety framework needs to include an information sharing capability for school threats and other relevant information. This capability needs to allow for robust communications both vertically—from the local level to state and federal level, as well as horizontally—between school safety centers themselves. State school safety centers should serve as a central conduit to facilitate effective and timely information sharing.

### **3. Scope of Statewide School Safety Centers**

- Statewide
- Comprehensive, yet flexible
- Leverage partnerships
- Technical assistance and training (via direct delivery and/or leveraging partner programs and capabilities)

The scope of a state-level school safety program should embrace a “whole of community” concept. School safety is complex, and any relevant program to promote it should be supported with adequate staffing and resources. While many states are challenged to provide sufficient funding to provide desired programs, training, and technical assistance across the full scope of school safety related programs, many other agencies at the state, local, and even federal level have existing programs, training, and technical assistance that can be leveraged to support individual state-level programs. A state program could serve to promote, coordinate, synchronize and de-conflict existing school safety programs provided by other agencies even if it cannot provide those core programs itself. Any state-level school safety program should be scalable, sustainable and resilient by design.

A statewide school safety center should promote the implementation of an integrated “whole community” approach to school safety by serving as a critical link between local communities and state and federal partners having a stake in school safety and security. There are multiple federal and national level organizations not traditionally associated with education, having ever changing programs and initiatives that materially support school safety. The

National Institute of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, US Secret Service, US Department of Homeland Security, Federal Emergency Management Agency, National Governors' Association, National School Boards' Association, and others all have programs and initiatives that may not be promoted down to the community, and which local school districts may be unaware of. An effective state level school safety center, collaborating with organizations such as the National School Safety Alliance, would serve as a logical conduit for information sharing in both directions between local school districts and federal/national partners.

A statewide school safety center should provide resources or access to resources across the full spectrum of safety and security to foster learning for all students in a safe, secure and nurturing environment, without regard to race, color, religion or other affiliations.

While public health and mental health are distinct and separate aspects of a comprehensive school safety program, both disciplines should be considered vital partners to support a comprehensive school safety program at the school/district level in any state.

#### **4. Target Capabilities of Statewide School Safety Centers**

- Provide training and technical assistance to school staff and community partners on topics such as, but not limited to:
  - Emergency Operations Planning
  - Guidance and resources for emergency drills and exercises
  - Behavioral threat assessments and intervention models
  - Terrorist and bomb threats
  - School-based police/security
  - Cyber/IT security and digital privacy
  - Internet & Social Media safety
  - Site vulnerability/threat/hazard assessments
  - Bullying/harassment/suicide awareness and prevention training
  - Positive school climate related programs, such as trauma-informed care models
- Conduct research on relevant topics
- Establish an information gateway for both the collection and dissemination of emerging best practices
- Promote best practices and evidence-based programs and initiatives
- Foster situational awareness on emerging issues

A statewide school safety center should:

- Advocate for and promote policies and funding that support comprehensive school safety and mental health efforts which are critical to ensuring universal and long-term sustainability of school safety programs. A school safety network should promote and provide information and tools that allow schools to assess and identify needs, strengths,

and gaps in existing services and supports (e.g., availability of school and community resources and unmet student mental health needs) that address both the physical and psychological/emotional safety of the whole school community.

- Coordinate stakeholders and provide information and tools to support communities in developing school leadership teams within and across programs related to school safety that include key personnel, such as: principals, teachers, school mental health professionals, instruction/curriculum professionals, school resource/safety officers, transportation staff, facilities personnel and other support staff, as well as outside local community partners such as public safety, emergency management, public health, mental health, etc.
- Serve as a communications pathway between schools, the community, state and federal partners and the private sector for identified needs, strengths and gaps in existing services and supports related to school safety-related programs. While working in collaboration with other relevant entities, such as state fusion centers, school safety centers should serve as critical communications conduits for emerging threats and challenges to school safety and security. As an example, in one state, an existing state school safety center maintains an “alert network” for school safety, at no cost to schools. This system, used only on the authority of the Director of Public Safety, provides to state government the ability to contact school officials instantly, any time of the day or night.
- Provide analysis and evaluation of the effectiveness of existing school safety-related programs, including but not limited to: emergency operations planning, behavioral threat assessments, bullying and suicide prevention, cyber/IT security, Internet safety, positive school climate, preventing school-to-prison-pipeline programs, etc. School safety centers should encourage the use of drills, exercises and other activities to provide opportunities for schools to practice response protocols for a variety of threats and hazards and to “test” emergency plans which can then serve to improve school EOPs.
- Encourage and provide trauma-informed recognition, response and guidance for school staff to promote social and emotional health for children to achieve goals and reach their full potential.
- Promote education on basic social media/cyber/IT security topics for school districts to share with students, staff, and parents to protect their personal identifying information, as well as school/district information from cyber hackers, ransomware attacks, etc.
- Provide and promote a basic educational foundation for police officers placed in schools, including but not limited to: understanding children and the teenage brain; working with special needs students; ethical considerations; diversity training; social media consideration; drug and crime prevention strategies; preventing violence in a school setting; informal counseling and mentoring strategies; state and district specific school code and laws; etc.

- Provide and promote best practice evaluation and assessment methodologies to address the physical/site safety of the school building and school grounds.
- In states where there are programs allowing the arming of teachers and/or specially trained school protection officers, school safety centers can provide relevant input for those programs, including post event mental health counseling considerations. Discussions related to the decision of arming teachers and school staff should be left to elected officials, but school safety centers should advocate for training and a full understanding of the roles and responsibilities associated with arming staff, as well as promote candid public discussion of the relevant legal and liability issues.
- Provide research and direction in areas where conflicting initiatives and methodologies have been applied to school communities and/or individuals within a school community. As needed, provide input to state and federal partners to de-conflict identified initiatives affecting school communities.