



Implementing Physical Safety Measures Effectively at Schools

Protecting students and staff in the event of a school shooting is an important consideration for school and district leaders. These include implementing multi-tiered supports for organizing proactive social, emotional, behavioral, and academic practices to promote a positive and inclusive school climate and overall well-being for students and staff. To maximize safety, schools should implement key physical safety measures and practices to prevent gun violence from occurring in schools.

Unfortunately, even when proactive systems exist, tragedies can still occur. This resource provides important information on a few key safety measures schools can implement and monitor to help in protecting schools from entry of unauthorized individuals and weapons and minimizing potential for injury and death in the event of school-based gun violence.

Physical safety measures should be viewed as only one part of a larger multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS). Prevention begins by establishing a school community in which students and staff are engaged in learning and feel a sense of belonging and where

needs are identified and addressed proactively (see resources at pbis.org and schoolclimate.org for additional information on establishing a consistently safe, positive, and inclusive school environment). Implementing physical safety practices should be done in consideration of social and emotional safety and with input from a diverse group of students, staff, families, and community members to ensure practices are matched to school and community needs and support an overall sense of safety and wellbeing. Physical safety measures are critical but when implemented outside of a safe, supportive school schoolwide climate and



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culture are insufficient. Schools have a responsibility not to discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, disability, age, or other protected classes when implementing school safety measures and policies. Physical safety practices will be most effective when implemented as part of system that is guided by a well-trained team, including bias training, that uses data to assess strengths and needs of the school community and any disproportionate application or impact, and promotes consistent, equitable, and accurate implementation.

This resource is a compilation of practice profiles highlighting considerations for improving physical safety for schools and classrooms in the context of school-based gun violence. As the evidence continues to emerge and additional practices are identified those practices will be reviewed for inclusion in future versions of this resource. In this introduction we describe considerations for implementation within a larger MTSS framework. Then, we provide specific practice profiles for [classroom practices](#), [outdoor and entrance practices](#), and [communication protocols](#). Each practice protocol describes the practice and key considerations for implementation. The development of this resource included a review of existing research, after-action reports, legal documents, and averted shooting reports and synthesizes lessons learned from school, district, and state recovery efforts over the last decade.ⁱ

Team Guided Implementation

As with any practice, care must be taken to ensure the practice is adapted to fit the specific context of the community and that systems are in place to support implementation. A team that is representative of and accountable to the school community (e.g., students, educators, family members) and other partners (e.g., community, public, and mental health professionals, as well as first responders) should make determinations about physical safety practices and policies and monitor implementation. The team should meet regularly to maintain strong relationships between the community and the school, and to train, learn, and practice physical safety measures together. When selecting practices the

team may consider available resources, staffing capacity, and staff, student, and family voices as part of this process. The team also has the responsibility of placing physical safety practices in the context of a larger system of proactive and positive support and continuing to assess the impact and effectiveness of each practice selected. Districts may already have an existing MTSS leadership team that could guide this work. Existing teams should start by assessing their team membership to ensure the team is adequately representative and includes members with all appropriate areas of expertise.

Assess Local Conditions

Teams should consider the specific characteristics of each building and campus when selecting physical safety measures. After teams identify specific strengths and vulnerabilities related to physical safety, they can select specific practices. Teams should select practices that reduce risk in a feasible and practical manner and that enhance an overall sense of wellbeing for staff and students. For example, teams may determine that gated entry to a large campus is not feasible and instead prioritize school building point of entry practices. Similarly, teams may determine in the context of a very large campus or school that a single point of entry is not feasible and instead decide to focus on securing multiple points of entry. In addition, teams must consider local building and fire codes and ensure that physical modifications to entries or classrooms are accessible by persons with mobility disabilities as well as coordinate proactively with local first responders. Teams should ensure individuals with these areas of expertise are included in these decisions. Teams should also consider a school or districts capacity to implement a practice consistently and effectively when selecting physical safety measures. For example, a team may decide that staffing all building entry points is not feasible at certain times during the school day due to staffing shortages or other responsibilities in the building and instead decide to reduce the number of entry points.



Promoting Consistent and Accurate Implementation

A practice will not be effective if it is implemented inconsistently or incorrectly. For example, if emergency procedures are clearly defined but not communicated with all staff (including substitutes), students, or families, confusion could increase risks in the event of an emergency. Similarly, if the school policy is that doors are closed and locked but students regularly open the door to allow friends to bypass entrance procedures, security could be compromised. Integrating physical safety features within a larger MTSS framework can provide systems to support consistent and high-fidelity implementation. To decrease vulnerability, teams should a) ensure that training is provided to all school staff and

students on relevant practices; b) plan and oversee required safety drills and ensure that procedures are age appropriate, emotionally safe, and implemented consistently and correctly; c) provide coaching and support to staff or students struggling with implementation; and d) use data and feedback from staff and students to continue to refine procedures and enhance implementation support. Teams should plan to increase support (e.g., communication, practice, monitoring) when conditions may make implementation more difficult (e.g., high numbers of substitutes or volunteers, unstructured setting).

Resources

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Endnotes

i — Considerations included in this document were identified using the following procedures:

- ▶ Scoping review of available academic literature, federal and independent after-action reports and averted school violence reports
 - ▶ Review of published academic literature related identified in relevant education and law enforcement databases and with relevant search terms (e.g., school shooting, active shooter, prevention, physical safety measures, hard corners, door locks etc.)
 - ▶ Review of federal and independent after-action reports including
 - ▶ Marjorie Stoneman Douglas High School Public Safety Commission
 - ▶ U.S. Secret Service 2019 and 2021 reports
 - ▶ Department of Justice Critical Incident Review: Active Shooter at Robb Elementary School
 - ▶ Oxford Community Schools Independent Report
 - ▶ Incident data on averted school violence reported to avertedschoolviolence.org
- ▶ Each source was reviewed and key recommendations were compiled. This list of recommendations was reviewed by a team to identify recommendations that met the following criteria:
 - ▶ Recommendations were generalizable to a wide range of schools and districts and not specific to one particular incident
 - ▶ Recommendations that were supported by findings across more than one report
 - ▶ Recommendations that were feasible and practical for most schools or districts to implement (For example, bullet resistant glass and building materials are recommended but were not considered feasible for large scale installation due to costs and other building code considerations in most districts. Therefore this document does not specifically address building material choices.)
 - ▶ Recommendations that were not contra-indicated by empirical research or other reports
 - ▶ Recommendations that were not solely promoted by for profit organizations

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These resources are provided to assist states, districts and schools in their gun violence prevention, preparation, response, and recovery to gun violence incidents. These resources are providing information based on published findings from past school incidents, experiences of state, local, and school-based personnel, families, and students, and emerging and promising practices.

This document contains resources that are provided for the user's convenience. The inclusion of these materials is not intended to reflect its importance, nor is it intended to endorse any views expressed, or products or services offered. These materials may contain the views and recommendations of various subject matter experts as well as hypertext links, contact addresses, and websites to information created and maintained by other public and private organizations. The opinions expressed in any of these materials do not necessarily reflect the positions or policies of the U.S. Department of Education. The U.S. Department of Education does not control or guarantee the accuracy, relevance, timeliness, or completeness of any outside information included in these materials.

The contents of this document do not have the force or effect of law and are not meant to bind the public. This document is intended as a resource on physical safety measures in schools for state and local education agencies, educators, students, and families. Further, this document does not provide specific guidance or information on the rights of children and schools' obligations under those Federal laws, please refer to information provided by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Safe and Supportive Schools in the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education; Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services; and Office for Civil Rights.

