

States respond to school safety concerns with 2013 legislation

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School safety policies are constantly evolving, often in response to fatal events. After several high-profile and tragic shootings over the past 15 years, school safety has become a major focus for parents, school officials, policymakers and the public nationwide. ECS conducted a scan of school safety-related laws passed in 2013 legislative sessions to better understand trends in policy. This report highlights the ongoing efforts of lawmakers to provide students with safe places to learn.

National overview:

- In 2013, 29 state legislatures passed 44 bills related to school safety.
- Nine states passed 11 bills amending or creating policies that regulate the presence of firearms or weapons on school grounds, including two bills specifically about higher education campuses.
- Fourteen bills addressed school safety plans, often creating greater specificity.
- Nine states encouraged greater coordination between schools and local law enforcement agencies.

ECS is simultaneously releasing a 2013 legislative scan of changes in mental health policies, a related topic. [Read the report](#)

State examples:

- **Tennessee** passed legislation allowing licensed and trained school employee to carry a firearm on school grounds; other states, such as **Oklahoma** and **South Dakota**, addressed the weapons issue.
- **Rhode Island** and **Virginia** allow school crisis response teams to access state mental health resources after an emergency or when a student's behavior may pose a threat.
- **Texas** created a certification program to recognize schools that meet certain safety criteria.
- **Washington** required school boards to consider installing perimeter safety control systems in schools and established a grant program to fund these systems.

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School safety plans

School safety plans, sometimes called crisis plans or emergency response plans, help school officials respond quickly and efficiently in a school crisis. They were one of the most common areas of focus in 2013.

Although many states have required safety plans for years, 13 states passed 14 pieces of legislation that either created plans or refined existing policy. Common changes include requiring schools to review and update the plans regularly, encouraging or requiring schools to coordinate with local law enforcement agencies when updating plans and encouraging or requiring schools to give local first-responder agencies copies of school safety plans.

- Eleven states refined existing school safety plan policies.
- Montana created new policies requiring school safety plans.
- Legislation in Washington requires schools to develop an emergency response system with local law enforcement that will expedite arrival of first responders. It also requires new schools and schools being remodeled to include safety elements in the building design.

Firearms/weapons

In 2013, following the Sandy Hook school tragedy in Connecticut, legislatures in nine states passed 11 bills related to authorizing the presence of firearms or weapons on school grounds. Two of these bills specifically focused on college campuses. The majority of these bills allow only school security personnel to carry weapons or firearms on school grounds. A few specify that only school resource officers -- sworn members of local law enforcement working at a school full- or part-time -- may bring a weapon on school grounds. States that passed legislation allowing armed security personnel typically require these security employees to receive certain types of training.

At least two states, Tennessee and Oklahoma, allow individuals who are not security personnel to carry firearms on school grounds, although Oklahoma's bill only applies to private schools. South Dakota created a program allowing armed employees or community volunteers with specific training to serve as school guards.

- Tennessee passed legislation allowing any school employee to carry a firearm on school grounds as long as they are licensed and have undergone certain training.
- Oklahoma allows licensed individuals to carry a firearm on the grounds of private schools, but only if school policies allow it.
- South Dakota's School Sentinel Program allows armed employees or community volunteers to serve as school guards. This policy also prohibits anyone but law enforcement and sentinels from having firearms on school grounds.
- Bills in a few states restrict the types of weapons or ammunition allowed on campuses. Texas also has further requirements around how security personnel must store weapons.
- Connecticut school districts may contract with businesses to hire security guards. If those guards will be armed, a 2013 bill restricts school districts to hiring only current or retired law enforcement officials.
- Universities in Texas may no longer restrict licensed individuals, including students, from storing or transporting firearms on campuses.
- University officials in Utah may not order someone to leave school grounds for merely possessing a firearm, although officials may order a person to leave if they believe the person intends harm.

Law enforcement

Ten states passed bills in 2013 with provisions requiring or encouraging schools and local law enforcement to coordinate on school safety issues. These bills typically encourage or require schools to consult with or include local law enforcement departments when updating, reviewing or developing school safety plans and then provide copies of these plans to local agencies. Some states also encourage or require local first responding agencies to participate in school safety drills. Finally, some states require state or local law enforcement agencies to train armed school employees and security personnel.

Legislation in Missouri and Illinois differed somewhat from other states. In Missouri, schools may enter into a memorandum of understanding with local law enforcement allowing school officers to enforce laws for crimes committed on school property. Illinois law requires all school principals to notify local police when students are threatened by weapons or gang activity.

Emergency drills

Emergency drills, held to help students and staff prepare for and be protected during emergencies, are a common part of school safety practices, but the trend is to target “intruder” or “lockdown” exercises. Some states are moving away from event-specific drills, such as tornado drills, and are requiring general “emergency” drills. In 2013, 10 states passed legislation updating their policies about school drills. Most of these policies change the frequency, purpose or name of required drills.

School safety personnel

During the 2013 legislative sessions, eight states addressed school safety personnel, including school police officers, security officers, resource officers (sworn members of local law enforcement working at a school full or part time) or volunteers. Most of the bills explicitly authorize schools to hire security or resource officers. That does not mean, however, that schools have been prohibited from such hires in the past. Some of these bills also require security personnel to be involved with creating or executing school security plans.

Texas created a new law enforcement category called the School Marshal. These officers have the authority of peace officers, with some limitations. For example, School Marshals can only make arrests in certain circumstances.

Task forces and studies

Several states passed laws requiring or requesting newly-created school safety task forces, legislative councils or education departments to conduct studies on school safety issues. Legislatures typically requested studies on the status of school security statewide, model security plans or best practices and recommendations for improving school security and building standards.

School safety funding

Five states created grant programs to provide schools with one-time funding to help with the costs of improving school security. Some states provide grants for schools to hire and train security personnel, and others allow schools to purchase safety equipment.

- Mississippi created MCOP, a grant program to increase the numbers of school resource officers. Most school districts must match the state’s grant dollars.
- Washington’s grant program specifically helps schools pay for a school perimeter safety system.

The Minnesota legislature provided schools with additional resources for school safety projects by expanding the state Safe Schools Levy's allowable uses to include costs for improving school safety.

School safety centers

Some states have existing state-funded centers or entities specifically charged with studying school safety issues. These organizations are typically asked to provide model school safety policies and technical assistance to schools on safety issues and to award school safety grants. During 2013, lawmakers in four states modified the scope of existing school safety centers while Maryland created a new entity, the Maryland Center for School Safety.

Safety assessment and response teams/mental health

Two states created policies that allow schools to request mental health resources and assistance from other state agencies, including when a student's behavior raises safety concerns.

- Rhode Island allows existing school crisis response teams, also called psychological response teams, to ask the state department for mental health resources when necessary. The state agency is also allowed to coordinate mental health services for students and employees affected by school violence.
- Virginia's policies require school boards to create threat assessment teams to identify and work with students whose behavior may pose a threat. The Virginia Center for School Safety will create model policies for threat assessment teams and student assessments.

Information sharing

Kentucky and Montana passed policies encouraging schools or other government agencies to share information that may impact school safety.

- Kentucky's department of education must create a method for notifying schools about a transferring student's past offenses.
- Montana's county interdisciplinary child information teams, where county agencies that serve children share relevant information with each other, must also share information that may affect school safety.

School safety certification

In 2013, Texas created a school safety certification program. The Texas School Safety Center will award certificates to schools that meet certain safety requirements outlined by the center. Some of the requirements include creating emergency plans and holding emergency drills.

Safety hotline

Michigan's department of the attorney general is responsible for a statewide anonymous hotline where students or members of the public may report tips about potential violence against students, school employees or school property.

Summary of school safety legislative changes by state

Category	Description	Bills	States	Common elements
School safety plans	Guidelines to direct school officials' response during an emergency	14	AL, AR, CA, CO, FL, KY, LA, MD, MS, MT, RI(2), VA, WA	Requiring schools to: review and update regularly; provide copies to and create or review with local law enforcement; include specific elements.
Firearms/ weapons	Allow for carrying of firearms or weapons on school grounds, including universities	11	AL, CO, CT, IN, OK, SD, TN, TX (3), UT	Allowing school security personnel to be armed on school grounds; defining the type of allowed weapons and ammunition; requiring certain training. Prohibiting universities from regulating weapons on campuses.
Law enforcement	School coordination with law enforcement or first responder agencies	11	AR, CO, IL(2), KY, LA, MO, OR, RI, VA, WA	Requiring or encouraging law enforcement to participate in creation or review of school safety plans; encouraging or requiring law enforcement to observe emergency drills.
Emergency drills	Exercises to help staff and students prepare for emergency situations	10	AL, AR, IL, KY, LA, MT, OK, OR, TN, VA	Modifying frequency of drills; reclassifying the purpose of drills (i.e., for intruder). Emergency drill names vary by state.
School safety personnel	School police, security officers, resource officers or volunteers	8	AL, CO, CT, IN, MS, MO, SD, TX	Allowing states to hire security officers, resource offices or school police; allowing schools to contract with local law enforcement for resource officers; training.
Task forces or studies	Requiring or requesting studies about school safety	7	AR, IL, IN(2), ME, NJ, TX	Creating a task force to review school safety issues; requesting or requiring school safety studies from legislative councils or education departments.

Category	Description	Bills	States	Common elements
School safety funding	Bills that create funding for school safety projects	6	IN, MN, MS, ND, PA, WA	Grant programs allowing schools to hire school safety personnel and/or purchase school safety equipment. Expanding allowable uses for a state tax to include school safety-related expenses.
Safety centers	State-funded centers or related entities that study school safety issues statewide	6	CO, MD, PA, TX, VA(2)	Creating or modifying responsibilities of state-funded school safety centers or entities. Centers to coordinate state-wide school safety activities and provide model safety plans.
Safety teams/mental health	Establish connections to mental health resources	2	RI, VA	Allowing school crisis response or threat assessment teams to seek mental health resources in some situations.
Information sharing	Cross sharing information that may affect school safety	2	KY, MT	Requiring county agencies or schools to cross share information that may affect school safety.
School safety certification program	Certification program for schools who meet safety standards	1	TX	Awards safety certifications to schools that meet certain requirements.
Safety hotline	Creates a state-wide hotline for potential school violence tips	1	MI	Creates a hotline where students or the public may anonymously report tips on potential violence.

Links to 2013 school safety legislative changes by state

Alabama

[House Bill 91](#) (School safety plans, emergency drills)

[Senate Bill 383](#) (School safety personnel, firearms/weapons)

Arkansas

[Senate Bill 93](#) (Task forces or studies)

[Senate Bill 140](#) (School safety plans, law enforcement, emergency drills)

California

[Assembly Bill 549](#) (School safety plans)

Colorado

[Senate Bill 138](#) (Law enforcement, safety centers, school safety personnel, school safety plans, firearms/weapons)

Connecticut

[Senate Bill 1099](#) (Firearms/weapons, school safety personnel)

Florida

[Senate Bill 284](#) (School safety plans)

Illinois

[House Bill 2768](#) (Law enforcement)

[Senate Bill 1625](#) (Emergency drills)

[Senate Bill 1931](#) (Task forces or studies)

[House Resolution 153](#) (Law enforcement)

Indiana

[House Bill 1015](#) (Task forces or studies)

[Senate Bill 1](#) (School safety funding, task forces or studies, school safety personnel, firearms/weapons)

Kentucky

[House Bill 354](#) (School safety plans, emergency drills, law enforcement, information sharing)

Louisiana

[House Bill 718](#) (School safety plans, emergency drills, law enforcement)

[Senate Resolution 203](#) (Task forces or studies)

Maine

[House Resolution 629](#) (Task forces or studies)

Maryland

[House Bill 453](#) (Safety centers)

[House Bill 983](#) (School safety plans)

Michigan

[Senate Bill 374](#) (Safety hotline)

Minnesota

[House File 630](#) (School safety funding)

Links to 2013 school safety legislative changes by state, cont'd

Mississippi

[Senate Bill 2659](#) (School safety funding, school safety personnel)

Missouri

[House Bill 152](#) (Law enforcement, school safety personnel)

Montana

[Senate Bill 348](#) (Emergency drills, school safety plans, information sharing)

New Jersey

[Assembly 3583](#) (Task forces or studies)

North Dakota

[Senate Bill 2267](#) (School safety funding)

Oklahoma

[House Bill 1622](#) (Firearms/weapons)

[Senate Bill 256](#) (Emergency drills)

Oregon

[House Bill 2789](#) (Emergency drills, law enforcement)

Pennsylvania

[Senate Bill 10](#) (Safety centers, school safety funding)

Rhode Island

[House Bill 5940A](#) & [Senate 800A](#) (School safety plans)

[Senate 801B](#) (Law enforcement, school safety plans, safety teams/mental health)

South Dakota

[House Bill 1087](#) (School safety personnel, firearms/weapons)

Tennessee

[House Bill 6](#) (Firearms/weapons)

[Senate Bill 267](#) (Emergency drills)

Texas

[House Bill 1009](#) (Firearms/weapons, school safety personnel)

[Senate Bill 1556](#) (Task forces or studies, safety centers)

[Senate Bill 1857](#) (Firearms/weapons)

[Senate Bill 1907](#) (Firearms/weapons)

Utah

[House Bill 28](#) (Firearms/weapons)

Virginia

[House 2344](#) (Safety centers, safety teams/mental health)

[House 2346](#) (Safety centers, law enforcement, emergency drills, school safety plans)

Washington

[Senate Bill 5197](#) (School safety funding, school safety plans, law enforcement)

More information

Many state-level school safety initiatives began in the 1990s, after a spate of shootings that included the 1999 Columbine High School tragedy in Colorado. ECS monitors aspects of school safety policies that continue to evolve, including policies on the following topics. Visit www.ecs.org to learn more.

- Anti-bullying
- Banning all weapons on school grounds (zero-tolerance policies)
- Violence prevention and violent student intervention
- State-level school safety task forces, studies and centers
- Alternative schooling for disruptive students
- School uniforms
- Suspension or expulsion due process procedures
- Modifying approaches to inappropriate student behavior
- Staff and student training on responding to emergencies
- Comprehensive school safety plans
- Allowing or increasing the presence of safety monitoring equipment in schools
- Student records transfer policies allowing information sharing, particularly between schools and law enforcement agencies
- Fiscal challenges
- Teacher protections from liability when intervening
- Safety elements in school building design

About ECS

The Education Commission of the States was created by states, for states, in 1965 to work with governors, legislators, chief state school officers, higher education officials and other leaders across all areas of education, from pre-K to college and the workforce. We track policy, translate research, provide unbiased advice and create opportunities for state policymakers to learn from one another.

The conclusions presented in this report are those of ECS, which receives the majority of its funding from the member states it serves. State policymakers seeking additional information on this topic should contact author Micah Wixom at mwixom@ecs.org. As part of the services ECS provides to states, staff members are available for consultation and to serve as third-party experts in legislative hearings.

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