



Model State School Safety Legislation



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The following model state legislation aims to combat the crisis of violence, bullying, and suicide devastating our nation's schools. In the vast majority of incidents of school violence, students display many warning signs or signals BEFORE taking harmful action. Unfortunately, the youth and adults who observe these signs or signals do not always recognize what they are seeing or do not report what they observed. We have an opportunity to prevent violence through commonsense policies that give our educators the evidence-based tools they need to save lives and empower our youth to be upstanders in their school and communities.

Section I: School Threat Assessment

Mandated school threat assessment has been the leading recommendation from mental health and safety experts and federal and state task forces following the shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary. Developed in partnership with the FBI, Secret Service, and U.S. Department of Education, following the tragedies at Columbine and Virginia Tech, evidence-based threat assessment and intervention programs have proven effective for over a decade in urban, suburban, and rural schools at averting violence toward self and others, reducing bullying, curbing suspensions and expulsions, and connecting students to needed services and supports.

This legislation will require that all schools serving students grades 6-12 are:

- Provided with a model threat assessment policy;
- Provided with a list of approved, evidence-based threat assessment trainings, including no-cost programming;
- Empowered to create a school-based threat assessment team; and
- Trained and certified in school threat assessment.

Section II: School Personnel and Student Suicide Prevention Training

For middle and high school age youth (ages 12-18), suicide is the 2nd leading cause of death and suicide rates are rising dramatically in children as young as 10 years old. 4 out of 5 of the youth who attempt suicide will give clear warning signs or tell someone of their plans to self-harm. Suicide is preventable when we train both youth and adults to know the warning signs of suicide and how to get help for themselves or others.

This legislation will require that all schools serving students grades 6-12 are:

- Training teachers and students in life-saving, evidence-based programs on suicide awareness and prevention that explains how to identify the signs and signals of depression, suicide, and self-injury, as well as the process for seeking help; and
- Provided a list of approved, evidence-based trainings, including no-cost programming, that are available to fulfill this requirement.

Section III: Student Safety and Violence Prevention Training

In a majority of acts of youth violence, the student displays warning signs or signals before taking any action. 80% of school shooters tell someone of their violent plans and 69% tell more than one person. Evidence-based violence prevention training can avert threats, from cutting and eating disorders to suicide and school shooting, before they happen and connect students to needed services by training youth and adults who observe these signs or signals to recognize what they are seeing or act to report it.

This legislation will require that all schools serving students grades 6-12 are:

- Administering evidence-based youth violence prevention trainings each school year that include how to identify observable warning signs and signals of an individual who may be a threat to themselves or others, as well as steps that should be taken when these signs are identified; and
- Provided a list of approved, evidence-based trainings, including no-cost programming, that are available to fulfill this requirement.

Section IV: Student Social Inclusion Training

Studies have shown that social isolation and loneliness can have a significant impact on a students' mental and physical health, academic performance, and peer relationships. By teaching students how to be more inclusive and connected to one another from a young age, we can create stronger school communities where marginalization and rejection are minimized, bullying is significantly reduced, and students' mental wellness is optimized.

This legislation will require that all schools serving students grades 6-12 are:

- Trained to understand and identify what social isolation is, the importance of taking it seriously, and how to seek help for peers; and
- Provided a list of approved, evidence-based trainings, including no-cost programming, that are available to fulfill this requirement.

Section V: Student-Led Violence Prevention Clubs

Equally important to training students to understand and identify the signs of suicide, violence, and social isolation is sustaining these learnings and embedding them in school culture. Student-led violence prevention clubs offer an opportunity for students to take ownership of what they have learned and apply it throughout the school year, ensuring that evidence-based learning is reinforced, and positive outcomes continue over time.

This legislation will require that all schools serving students grades 6-12:

- Designate a student-led violence prevention club that is open to all members of the student body; and

- Require that the club implement and sustain suicide, violence prevention, and social inclusion trainings and awareness activities and foster opportunities for student leadership development.

Section VI: Anonymous Reporting Program

Research has shown that confidentiality and anonymous reporting are necessary tools in the difficult task of getting students to share the awareness that a student may be a danger to themselves or others. Integrating anonymous reporting into school safety training and resources ensures that more information flows between students, parents, educators, and schools to help prevent tragedies before they happen.

This legislation will require that the Department of Education:

- Establish and operate a hotline, multilingual crisis center, website and mobile phone application in conjunction with an anonymous reporting program;
- Require and certify the training of school-based teams to receive notice of any report submitted regarding a member of the school community;
- Promote the program; and
- Issue a report on the results of the program, including the number of reports received, the number of false reports and the number of both mental wellness referrals and disciplinary actions resulting from reports.

Definition of “Evidence-based”

“Evidence-based” means a program or practice that demonstrates a statistically significant effect on relevant outcomes based on

- strong evidence from not less than 1 well-designed and well-implemented experimental study;
- moderate evidence from not less than 1 well-designed and well-implemented quasi-experimental study; or
- promising evidence from not less than 1 well-designed and well-implemented correlational study with statistical controls for selection bias; or
- demonstrates a rationale based on high-quality research findings or positive evaluation that such program or practice, is likely to improve relevant outcomes, and includes ongoing efforts to examine the effects of the program or practice.