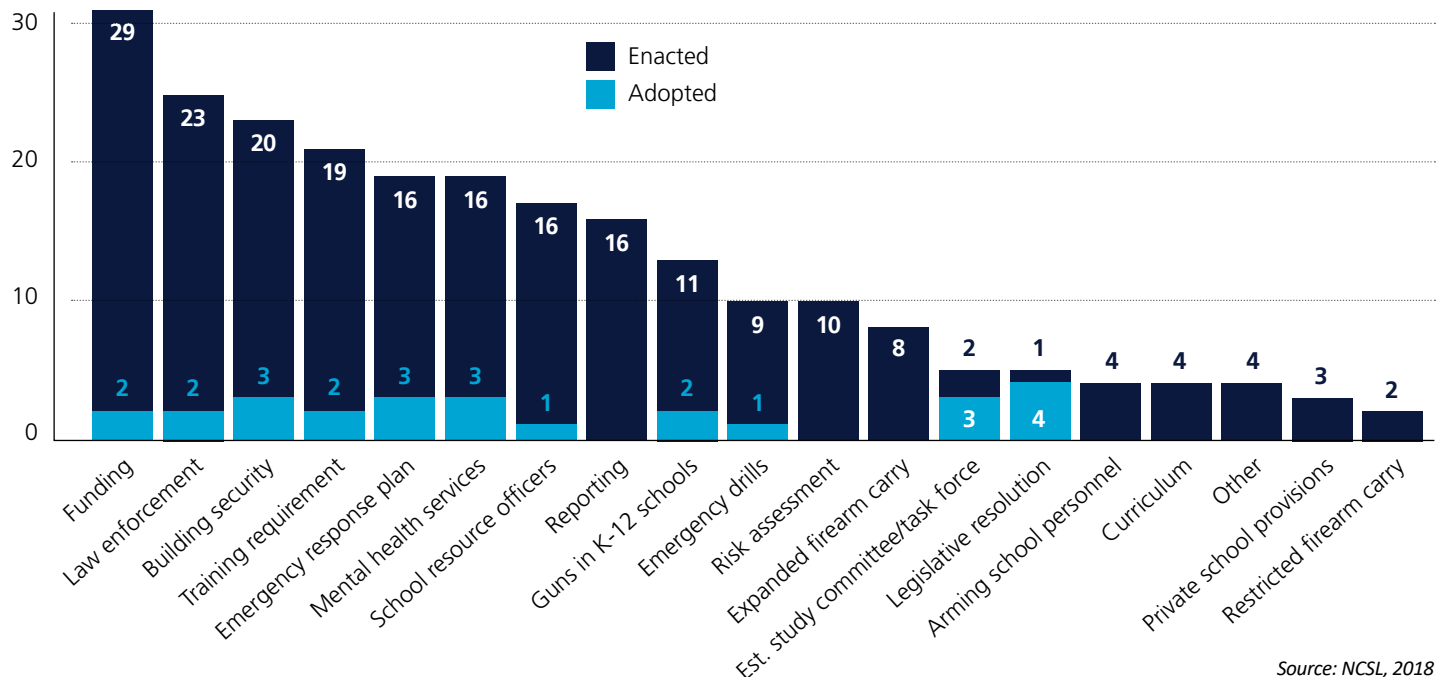


State Measures Regarding School Safety



Source: NCSL, 2018

States Seek to Improve School Safety

BY BEN ERWIN

Few tragedies produce the level of public outcry that occurs after a school shooting. Against the backdrop of the killing of 17 students at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Fla., school safety captivated the national audience once again in 2018. With instances of school violence [on the rise](#), policymakers continue to grapple with ways to address what has become an all-too-common reality.

Although [research](#) indicates there is no profile of a school shooter, a variety of effective practices are known to diminish the likelihood of school violence, ranging from [threat assessment protocols](#) to [technological and infrastructural improvements](#).

To address the multitude of factors that contribute

to effective preventions, mitigation and response to school violence, states have been working to set school safety standards, empower schools and districts to implement evidence-based practices, and finance improvements.

State Action

In the wake of a number of high-profile school shootings, state legislatures around the country have pursued measures to address school safety. The 2018 legislative session saw 43 states propose 392 bills and resolutions related to school safety, enacting or adopting 87 of them.

States have consistently revisited the development and content of emergency response plans and drills following instances of school violence. Build-

Did You Know?

- There were 23 [school shootings](#) resulting in injury or death in 2018.
- Incidents of violence [increased](#) 113 percent between the 2016–2017 and 2017–2018 school years.
- There is no profile of a school attacker, but there are effective strategies to prevent, mitigate and respond to acts of school violence.

ing on a [well-established](#) foundation, 27 states proposed 65 bills related to emergency response plans. Seventeen of these bills and resolutions were enacted in 14 states. Separately, 47 bills and resolutions in 21 states were proposed requiring or mandating the content of emergency drills, eight of which were enacted or adopted in seven states.

Building infrastructure remained a top issue as schools struggle to retrofit and update security features. Sixteen states enacted 21 of 72 proposed bills that updated building standards and funded infrastructure improvements.

Arming school personnel emerged as a hot topic early in the session as 24 states proposed legislation on the topic. Despite an initial wave, only two states enacted three bills that included provisions addressing the possession of firearms by school staff. Florida [SB 7026](#), for example, established a school guardian program for nonclassroom personnel. [Oklahoma HB 2527](#) allows districts to establish training and licensure policies for the possession of firearms by school personnel.

School resource officers (SROs) garnered more attention from legislatures seeking to increase security at schools. SRO training requirements including mental health and cultural competency also became a priority. Of the 84 bills from 29 states regarding SROs, 16 were adopted.

Maryland [SB 1265](#) took a comprehensive approach to school safety that emphasized the role of resource officers. The bill provides grant funding to place an SRO in all Maryland schools and mandatory training on bias, disability awareness, school climate, interacting with students and cultural awareness. The law also requires reporting on school safety data to better inform grant funding and the direction of state resources and technical assistance.

In addition to SRO requirements, Maryland's law—along with Florida's [SB 7026](#)—create school and district threat assessment teams, which have been [highlighted](#) by the U.S. Secret Service as a key piece of any effective school safety policy. Florida's law establishes the position of "school safety specialist" to head up the threat assessment team as well as school emergency planning. The teams, made up of various school faculty and staff, are tasked with reviewing patterns of threatening or concerning behavior and consulting with relevant stakeholders to implement a coordinated response.

Legislatures also have recognized the [importance](#) of school climate and student mental health in keeping schools safe. Seventeen bills or resolutions in 13 states were enacted or adopted to address training and coordinating mental health services. Illinois [HB 4658](#) provides for mental health training for school personnel that focuses on identifying warning signs and proper referral and intervention techniques.

In an effort to improve school climate through positive behavioral interventions and support, including for students who have experienced trauma, Georgia [HB 763](#), requires every county to establish a compulsory attendance and school climate committee. The committee will be made up of school and county stakeholders who will explore and recommend policy options to improve school climate in their school districts.

Consistent with school climate and mental health, legislatures also included suicide prevention in the discussion of school safety. Fifteen states enacted 21 bills related to suicide prevention. The legislation addressed grant funding, training for school personnel, prevention protocols, and the coordination of intervention services.

Federal Action

Federal action has largely focused on supporting state and district efforts to implement context-specific approaches to school safety. President Donald Trump formed a [Federal Commission on School Safety](#) to identify meaningful policy recommendations to prevent school violence. Led by Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos, the commission consisted of representatives from the departments of Health and Human Services, Homeland Security and Justice. The commission studied a range of topics, including facility security, mental health services, coordination with law enforcement, threat assessment, school-based violence prevention strategies and positive behavior interventions. [The commission's final report](#) was released Dec. 18. [NCSL has compiled a timeline of the commission's work.](#)

Alongside executive action, Congress enacted the [STOP School Violence Act](#), which appropriated additional [grant funding](#) for school safety to be administered by the Department of Justice. Other federal agencies, including the [United States Secret Service](#), [Department of Education](#) and [Department of Homeland Security](#), have released a wealth of resources to inform school safety policy decisions.

Additional Resources

- [NCSL School Safety webpage](#)
- [Homeland Security Operational Guide on Enhancing School Safety Using a Threat Assessment Model](#)
- [U.S. Department of Education, Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools Technical Assistance Center](#)
- [National Association of Psychologists, Framework for Safe and Successful Schools](#)
- [National Clearinghouse for Educational Facilities Safe Schools](#)
- [National Institute of Justice Report of Federal School Safety Programs, 1990-2016](#)
- [Homeland Security, School Safety and Security](#)
- [The Role of Technology in Improving School Safety](#)

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