

The following are a list of recommended actions that schools district in Texas should address between now and the start of the 2018-2019 school year. These recommendations are accompanied by resources and guidance, and collectively support the goal of ensuring that districts are prepared for a variety of threats and hazards, including mass acts of violence:

1. School districts should reevaluate access control and visitor management policies and procedures for ALL facilities.

Limiting access to only those authorized by the school or district, is a primary component of providing a safe and secure learning environment. Access control takes into consideration the number and location of entrances and exits of a school or other district facility. There are many best practices that will help harden our schools as targets for entry. These practices include limiting the number of entrances to a school facility, utilizing secure vestibules to direct all visitors into a secure area for identification and authorization before being allowed access to a school building, monitoring of all entrances by law enforcement or security personnel, and utilizing technology locking and monitoring systems for all entrances and exits. Effective utilization of any security system still relies on human intervention, which requires consistent and frequent training. Exterior doors should remain locked from the outside, except for specific times when they can be effectively monitored. There are no “one-size-fits-all” solutions for access control. There are many situations that schools must prepare for in addition to the physical controlling of entrances and exits.

Strong visitor management procedures will help ensure that only authorized individuals are allowed into a school. Setting appropriate procedures for admission to a school or facility is essential to maintaining security. Not all visitors should be allowed into the facility based on need. Limiting the number of visitors greatly improves chances of effectively monitoring visitors. All visitors must be monitored to ensure they are only in the areas authorized and that they follow procedures by checking out with the office at the expected time. It is highly recommended that all school facilities test their access control and visitor management procedures periodically and randomly. The TxSSC has developed guidance for performing an [Intruder Assessment](#) both as part of the [safety and security audit process](#) and as used throughout the school year to monitor adherence to procedures.

2. School districts should empower all stakeholders to be situationally aware and to report suspicious activity.

Training all staff, students and visitors to maintain a high level of situational awareness is an effective tool in protection for our schools. Everyone has the responsibility of reporting any unusual or suspicious behavior. *See something, Say something, Do something* is important. With appropriate training, all stakeholders can be prepared to initiate an appropriate response to avoid, deny and defend against an intruder. Anonymous reporting systems are essential to aid in identifying those in need of intervention as well as to investigate reports of suspicious behavior and taking appropriate protective actions.

3. School districts must coordinate and collaborate with law enforcement and other first responders to develop strong school safety programs.

Coordination and collaboration between school districts and local/regional/and state resources are necessary to ensure the development of high quality emergency operations plans which allow for effective prevention/mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery from incidents and emergencies. Texas Education Code 37.108 (3) requires that district's multi-hazard emergency operations plan provides for "measures to ensure coordination with the Department of State Health Services and local emergency management agencies, law enforcement, health departments, and fire departments in the event of an emergency".

School districts should identify responders and resources in their area and conduct meetings to discuss, develop and review emergency operations plans as well as resource needs and availability. Keeping an updated contact list of all collaborative responding agencies will prove invaluable in the times of an emergency. Collaborative training and drilling should be developed with all agencies to ensure identification of gaps and weaknesses in planning and execution. The development of Memoranda of Understanding and Mutual Aid Agreements will help to address specific roles and needs in advance of an emergency. The Texas School Safety Center provides the following resources to support coordination efforts: [Training, Drilling and Exercising Toolkit](#), [High-Quality Emergency Operations Planning Toolkit](#), and the [Texas School Safety and Security Standards](#). The Center also provides more detailed guidance for [developing agreements with specific agencies](#) and [resource management](#).

4. School districts should explore all alternatives to add additional protective measures for students and staff.

Recent events have accelerated discussions by school districts seeking to provide additional protection for students and staff. Some school districts may not have the resources available to deploy school-based law enforcement officers in their facilities; therefore, other alternatives should be explored. In 2013, the Texas legislature enacted Texas Education Code 37.0811 allowing the school district's board of trustees or the governing body of an open-enrollment charter school to appoint one or more specially trained and licensed employees as school marshals. The school marshal law allows for the appointment of one designated school marshal per campus but not more than one per 200 students in average daily attendance per campus. The school district's board of trustees must make the appointment and the appointee must be licensed and certified by the Texas Commission on Law Enforcement (TCOLE). More information on the Texas School Marshal program can be found on the [TCOLE website](#).

5. School districts should establish and utilize behavioral threat assessment teams to identify students that pose a threat either to themselves or others and provide appropriate interventions to prevent an act of violence from occurring.

Behavioral threat assessment or threat management- is a process designed to identify, investigate, evaluate and manage threats and other troubling behavior. The school threat assessment model developed by the United States Secret Service and the Department of Education provides a how-to guide for school personnel, law enforcement professionals, mental health professional and community members on how to set up and operate school threat assessment teams. Establishing threat assessment teams in schools provides an avenue to report concerning behavior. Having an

established threat assessment process can quickly sort out misunderstandings from true concerns. Most importantly, a threat assessment process makes it possible to intervene with the person who is planning an act of violence and get them the help they need. These teams should be trained in the threat assessment process and include a multidisciplinary set of individuals (e.g., principal, school counselor, and SRO). School threat assessment training will help practitioners understand why and how school violence prevention is possible and allow them to identify the functions of threat assessment (identify, investigate, evaluate and manage).

6. School districts should thoroughly and continuously review, revise, and maintain multi-hazard emergency operations plans.

Emergency planning is a continuous process even after the plan is published. Plans should evolve as the school and planning teams learn lessons, obtain new information and insights, and update priorities. Reviews should be a reoccurring activity. Planning teams should establish a process for reviewing and revising the plan at least annually. Districts and campuses should review and update their plans after actual emergencies, changes in policy, personnel, facilities, or equipment, after drills and exercises, changes to local community emergency plans, new threats or hazards emerge, and after safety assessments are conducted. Districts should always ensure that local partners, including law enforcement and other first responders have a copy of the most current plan. The Texas School Safety Center's [High-Quality Emergency Operations Planning Tool](#) provides detailed guidance on all aspects of a comprehensive planning process.

Drilling and exercising is a critical piece of the planning process to ensure that of gaps and weaknesses in planning and execution are identified and addressed. Drills should be conducted regularly to test specific actions in the plan, including during summer months if district facilities are being utilized. The Texas School Safety Center's [Training, Drilling, and Exercising Toolkit](#) provides guidance on implementing a comprehensive drill and exercise program.

7. School districts should conduct safety and security assessments of all facilities in an effort to identify areas for immediate and long-term improvement.

The Texas Education Code §37.108 states: “At least once every three years, each school district shall conduct a safety and security audit of the district’s facilities. While the term “audit” is included in TEC §37.108, the process developed by the Texas School Safety Center is meant to be an ongoing assessment of a district’s safety and security. Audits should be an ongoing process with the aim of identifying hazards, threats, and vulnerabilities that might pose a danger to life or property and/or may interfere with a safe, secure and healthy environment that is conducive to teaching and learning. Attention to safety and security should not be thought of as an annual or a once-every three year “audit” event. Districts are encouraged to integrate ongoing safety and security assessments into everyday activities. This includes planning, training, and drilling of emergency procedures.

A safety audit provides an overview of facility safety by identifying areas that need improvement and also those that are commendable. This proactive process ensures students are achieving their ultimate learning potential in a safe and secure environment. The [K-12 Safety and Security Audit Guide](#) was developed by the Center to assist school districts in conducting safety and security audits of their facilities

8. School districts should ensure that Safety and Security Committees meet regularly and have an active and ongoing role in maintaining safety and security.

Texas Education Code Chapter 37.109 states that school districts must form a district safety and security committee. This committee must actively participate on behalf of the district in developing and implementing emergency plans for campuses and other facilities. The committee must also ensure each site emergency plan is consistent with the district EOP and reflects specific campus, facility, or support service needs. The committee is further utilized in the safety audit process to provide campus, facility, and support service information to be used in the audit and to review the district audit report data before it is submitted to the Texas School Safety Center. The Texas School Safety Center provides [detailed guidelines](#) for these committees as well as a [sample policy](#).

The safety and security committee should include community partners such as first responders, local emergency management staff, and others who have roles and responsibilities in school emergency management before, during, and after an incident. This includes local law enforcement officers, emergency medical services (EMS) personnel, school resource officers, fire officials, public and mental health practitioners, and local emergency managers. Their expertise will inform the development, implementation, and refinement of the school emergency operations plan.

9. School districts should adopt the Standard Response Protocol and Standard Reunification Method as protective measures that can be incorporated into their multi-hazard emergency operations plan.

School districts are required by Texas Education Code 37.108 to adopt and implement a multi-hazard emergency operations plan for use in district facilities, that addresses mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery; that provides for district employee training in responding to an emergency; provides for drills and exercises as mandated by the plan; measures to ensure coordination with state and local response agencies as well as the implementation of safety and security audits. The [Standard Response Protocol \(SRP\) toolkit](#), developed by the Texas School safety Center in collaboration with the “I Love U Guys Foundation”, offers guidance and resources for incorporating the SRP into a school emergency operations plan, for response to emergencies and incidents within schools and support facilities. The Texas Edition incorporates Texas specific guidance and mandates into the protocol.

The SRP allows for clear understandable communication for response to the multiple hazards that schools must mitigate, prepare for, respond to and recover from. The SRP is based around 5 main protocols. **Lockout** for responding to a threat OUTSIDE of a school/facility; **Lockdown** for responding to a threat INSIDE a school/building; **Evacuate** for responding to a threat that requires moving out of the school/facility or current area; **Shelter** for response to a severe weather incident or to a hazardous materials spill; and **Hold** for staying where you are to keep halls clear or suspend movement in a school/building temporarily. The SRP allows for the integration of additional protective actions specific to the needs of a district such as active shooter protocol, like Avoid, Deny and Defend. The SRP works well with other established protocol that

a district or school utilizes and allows for consistent messaging to students, staff and responders in an emergency.

The [Standard Reunification Method \(SRM\) toolkit](#), offers guidance and resources for incorporating the Standard Reunification Method into the school or districts' emergency operations plans. School emergencies may require evacuation or changes in the operational schedules, necessitating a well-organized and structured way to reunite students with parents and legal guardians while the school retains accountability for their students. The SRM provides guidance and materials for the development and execution of the student/parent reunifications.

10. School districts should review the Texas School Safety and Security Standards and compare their current safety and emergency management programs to these mandates and best practices pertaining to school safety and security.

The [Texas Unified School Safety and Security Standards](#) provide a set of criteria to assist school districts in developing and implementing a comprehensive emergency management program in keeping with laws, mandates, directives and best practices. The framework of the Standards is based on the National Incident Management System (NIMS), which makes district emergency operations compatible with those of other governmental, private, and volunteer entities providing the best possible safety for students, staff, and visitors. The Standards are mapped to the four phases of emergency management: Mitigation/Prevention, Preparedness, Response, and Recovery. Districts can utilize the Standards to advance a well prepared and protected learning environment for students and staff.