



Elaine M. Howle *State Auditor*

CONTACT: Margarita Fernández | (916) 445-0255 x 343 | MargaritaF@auditor.ca.gov

School Violence Prevention

School Districts, County Offices of Education, and the State Must Do More to Ensure That School Safety Plans Help Protect Students and Staff During Emergencies

Background

School-based violence and active shooter incidents nationwide are on the rise. California’s educational institutions, such as the California Department of Education (CDE), public school districts, county offices of education (county offices), and the schools themselves are charged with creating safe and secure learning environments. Each school district and county office must develop annual safety plans for its schools that operate kindergarten or any of grades 1 through 12. We were asked to evaluate K–12 schools readiness to respond to emergencies, especially active shooter threats and incidents in and around school campuses.

Our Key Recommendations

- The Legislature should require the following:
 - » Safety plans to include procedures, such as lockdowns, recommended by federal and state agencies to ensure appropriate response to violent incidents at school sites.
 - » CDE to conduct an annual survey to determine if schools have submitted approved safety plans and annually report the results.
 - » The CDE/DOJ partnership to periodically review safety plans to ensure the plans keep pace with evolving school environments.
- CDE should provide additional guidance such as up-to-date safety plan compliance checklists and best practices for monitoring and approving safety plans.
- CDE and DOJ should resume their partnership activities to ensure districts, county offices, and schools receive guidance on safety issues.
- School districts and county offices should implement procedures to monitor and approve their schools’ safety plans.

Key Findings

- Although some schools include practices for responding to violent incidents in their comprehensive school safety plans, many districts and county offices do not because state law does not require it.
- Of the 27 school safety plans at six entities we reviewed, many were missing required key policies and procedures to keep students and staff safe.
 - » Nine of the safety plans had not been evaluated or amended each year, even though state law requires an annual evaluation of safety plans.
 - » Four entities had not communicated any of their safety plans during a public meeting at the school site and did not obtain input from community members.
 - » Fourteen of the safety plans were missing procedures for notifying teachers when dangerous pupils are enrolled in their classes and 12 were missing all eight elements related to assessing and creating a safe environment.
- Some county offices and districts have provided inadequate oversight—they have not ensured all of their schools have procedures in place to operate in a safe manner during emergencies. In fact, San Bernardino City Unified—which recently experienced an active shooter incident at one of its schools—indicated that 15 of its 73 schools did not have a 2017 safety plan.
- The State has not provided adequate guidance and training on safety plan issues.
 - » CDE’s guidance is insufficient, and it has not confirmed that all public schools submit safety plans and that districts and county offices approve them.
 - » CDE and the Department of Justice (DOJ) allowed the activities of the school-law enforcement partnership—intended to develop policies, provide training, and administer safe school programs—to lapse several years ago.

K–12 Schools and Institutes of Higher Education Are the Second Most Common Location for Active Shooting Incidents

