

## School Safety Advisory Board 2021-2022 Recommendations

The Maryland Safe to Learn Act of 2018, Md. Code Ann., Educ. §§ 7-1501-1512, established the School Safety Subcabinet and Advisory Board while significantly altering and expanding the role of the Maryland Center for School Safety (MCSS). The Subcabinet serves as a regulatory authority and as the governing board of MCSS and the Advisory Board provides advice and assists the Subcabinet in completing its duties.

Prior to the start of the 2021-2022 school year, the School Safety Subcabinet asked the Advisory Board to identify gaps and opportunities in school safety and to develop recommendations on how best to address the identified gaps.

The Advisory Board sees a need for the state to continue to focus on broad approaches to school safety beyond physical safety with consideration given to balancing the minimum safety and security elements necessary to ensure student and school safety without efforts that allow Maryland's diverse schools to better identify and address the needs and concerns of our students. In the process, creating inclusive educational environments free from fear, harm, trauma, and unnecessary hardship.

The Advisory Board identified several areas where school safety efforts should be expanded or explored.



# Evaluation and Data Collection

## Observation 1

It is unclear if legislation, policies, actions, and efforts are making improvements in school safety.

With the enactment of the Safe to Learn Act 2018, many efforts have been made at the state and local levels. However, it is unclear whether the legislative requirements including training, funding, and emergency management efforts have improved the safety of students or schools.

### Recommendation 1.1

The State should identify and secure funding to conduct broad and targeted research and evaluation of efforts to determine the impact of legislation, policies, and other efforts on improving the safety of students and schools.

## Observation 2

The collection of school safety and other data collected and reported to and by the State (e.g., arrest data, bullying, use of force) needs consistency across school systems to limit inaccuracies and consolidate data collection and reporting requirements on local schools and school systems.

### Recommendation 2.1

Conduct an assessment of data collected and collection procedures to determine how best to consolidate and report information that better informs school safety initiatives and actions.

### Recommendation 2.2

Convene a diverse workgroup to review and modify, as appropriate, the existing arrest data reporting requirements to ensure school-based arrest data collection is distinguishable from community based arrests including those defined as “reportable offenses.”



# Resources and Training

## Observation 3

There is a need for more support to identify behaviors of concern, de-escalate situations, and provide resources to re-engage, and strengthen school, community, students, parents, and staff relationships thereby creating a culture of civility.

### Recommendation 3.1

Develop or expand informational practices and training to educate stakeholders including students, staff, parents, and communities on identifying behaviors of concern. These resources should incorporate the student voice.

### Recommendation 3.2

Continue efforts that communicate the impact of trauma and the need for trauma informed care.

### Recommendation 3.3

Conduct an assessment of health curriculum (i.e., substance abuse, suicidal ideation) across the state and ensure consistency of curriculum statewide.

### Recommendation 3.4

Conduct an assessment of relationship violence curriculum.

### Recommendation 3.5

Expand the use and awareness of Safe Schools Maryland (SSMD) throughout all Maryland schools.

## Observation 4

A gap exists between safe school buildings and safe communities. There is limited capacity to provide students with a continuum of community-based interventions and after-school programs that support positive behavior. Many students live in communities where they are experiencing or witnessing serious violence.

### Recommendation 4.1

Explore creative solutions to expand the availability of safe after school activities, which include transportation.

## Recommendation 4.2

Expand the availability of transportation for after-school programs.

## Recommendation 4.3

Explore after-school mentoring programs that remain in place all the way through a student's school career. This would help increase engagement and make schools feel like complete campus communities.

## Observation 5

Build mechanisms to fill gaps in human resources including educators, crisis intervention supports, security, mental health, social workers, facility and support staff, bus drivers, public safety, etc.

## Recommendation 5.1

Develop multiple strategies for filling gaps in school and school support staffing at the State and local levels.

## Recommendation 5.2

Provide data on current mental/behavioral health staffing levels by school type (i.e., elementary, middle, high) compared with student enrollment numbers and "ideal" ratios identified by national association of school psychologists.

## Observation 6

There are unrealistic expectations regarding what law enforcement and educators can do in response to social media threats or posts.

## Recommendation 6.1

Develop guidance on the criminal and administrative investigation and response to social media threats made against schools. This should include the development of a public infographic to explain the process from the identification of the threat through investigation and resolution.

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# Emergency Preparedness

## Observation 7

Schools (public, private, non-public) must implement comprehensive school safety preparedness programs that includes assessment, equipping, planning, training, testing (i.e., exercising and drilling), evaluating, and the tracking of improvements.

### Recommendation 7.1

Identify existing federal and state funding available for schools which support comprehensive preparedness efforts for all schools, including private and non-public.

### Recommendation 7.2

Request additional state funding to support comprehensive preparedness efforts for all schools, including private and non-public.

### Recommendation 7.3

Expand preparedness guidance and resources to support comprehensive school emergency preparedness efforts. This may include the development of new guidance documents, exercise templates, video training, and other resources to support school emergency preparedness efforts statewide.

## Observation 8

Since the onset of the pandemic there is a need to better ensure cyber security of students, schools, and school systems from cyber incidents.

### Recommendation 8.1

The State should provide cyber security recommendations, training, and resources to assist schools and school systems in conducting cyber assessments and cyber response plans.

### Recommendation 8.2

Provide training and resources for students and guardians on cybersecurity safety at home.

### Recommendation 8.3

Improve or expand digital citizenship education and awareness for Pk-12 students to help them better understand their “digital footprint” and help them make good decisions when using online media.

### Observation 9

Need to address and correct inaccurate information which has the potential to inflame tensions.

### Recommendation 9.1

Develop education and guidance on how to quickly identify and address inaccurate information while balancing response efforts, which do not dilute effective communication strategies.

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## Building and Facility

### Observation 10

Although there is a need for more focus on approaches to school safety beyond physical safety and greater consideration of the possible negative effects of physical safety measures, including security technology and personnel, there is a continued need for funding for physical security upgrades, replacements, and additions for schools facilities and buses. These may include cameras, fencing, access control systems, vestibules, etc.

### Recommendation 10.1

IAC, MSDE, and MCSS should review existing facility security guidance and develop recommendations for minimum physical security, including design and technology, that have the least negative effects on students.

### Recommendation 10.2

Continue to provide public and private schools with access to funding to address physical security and equipment upgrades.

### Recommendation 10.3

Develop recommendations to address non-physical security approaches to improve the safety of our schools.

### Observation 11

The SRO grant does not allow agencies to hire, funding can not be used for other purposes, and the allocation formula in statute provides only \$7K per public school.

### Recommendation 11.1

Bring together local law enforcement agencies and school systems to review the existing STLA grant language and discuss potential amendments to the statute, development of grant regulation, or grant administrative changes.

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