

NORTH CAROLINA

State Action Plan for School Safety

2021-2026



Updated:
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NORTH CAROLINA STATE ACTION PLAN FOR SCHOOL SAFETY June 2021

The North Carolina Task Force for Safer Schools endorsed the five-year North Carolina State Action Plan for School Safety (SAPSS) in June 2021.

The SAPSS is designed to coordinate North Carolina school safety efforts across state government and with communities and schools so that efforts are efficient and effective and undertaken with accountability and shared responsibility. It frames these efforts for the next five years with 2021-2022 SAPSS as the baseline or starting plan.

The Task Force for Safer Schools will use the SAPSS to monitor and adjust school safety efforts.

The SAPSS is truly an action plan that will evolve as circumstances and situations change over the next five years.

State Action Plan for School Safety

Task Force for Safer Schools Endorsement:

Having reviewed the development, Vision, Guiding Principles, Goals, Objectives, and Initiatives of the State Action Plan for School Safety, we endorse it as a five-year action plan with the initial document serving as the baseline plan for school safety efforts which are designed to make the SAPSS's vision a reality.

NORTH CAROLINA

STATE ACTION PLAN FOR SCHOOL SAFETY: 2021-2026

PURPOSE:

To coordinate North Carolina school safety efforts across state government and with communities and schools so that efforts are efficient and effective and undertaken with accountability and shared responsibility.

PARTICIPANTS:

- Local Representation
- State Board of Education
- Task Force for Safer Schools Committees
- Center for Safer Schools
- Executive Steering Committee on State Action Plan for School Safety
- Department of Public Instruction
- Department of Health and Human Services
- Department of Justice
- Department of Public Safety
- School Safety Directors
- Specialized Instructional Support Personnel
- Public

PROCESS:

The process for developing the State Action Plan for School Safety (SAPSS) involved the listed participants; notable in the process are four briefings (October 2019; January 2020; September 2020; April 2021) of the Task Force for Safer Schools and substantive review by the Task Force's committees. The Department of Public Safety coordinated the process and was guided by the Executive Steering Committee on SAPSS, which has members from all the named state departments, including the Center for Safer Schools, as well as local representatives and subject matter experts. As part of this process, roles for the SAPSS's initiatives were delineated by who has responsibilities for carrying out them out, who is ultimately accountable for tracking and monitoring them, who should be communicated with to assist with decisions, and who needs to be informed.

In addition to attending public meetings of the Task Force for Safer Schools, members of the public helped develop some of the primary sources (listed below) used to generate the SAPSS. Public hearings and meetings were held by the NC House Select Committee on School Safety and the Governor's Crime Commission Special Committee on School Shootings. Students, teachers, school support personnel, school administrators, parents, and law enforcement officials participated in these hearings. A website with a forum for public comment generated additional public input.

PRIMARY SOURCES USED IN DRAFTING THE STATE ACTION PLAN FOR SCHOOL SAFETY:

- Center for Safer Schools reports (2013; 2015)
- State School Safety Activity reports (collected quarterly by Department of Public Safety; started in 2018)
- North Carolina House Select Committee on School Safety Report (2018)
- Governor's Crime Commission Special Committee on School Shootings Report (2018)
- Federal Commission on School Safety Report (2018)

SCOPE:

PreK-12 schools in North Carolina with a five-year (2021-2026) horizon

GUIDING PRINCIPLES:

1. The safety of our students, teachers, and school staff at PreK-12 schools is our focus.
2. Actions undertaken to make schools safer should be carried out fairly and with a “do no harm” approach.
3. School and communities, often in partnership, have already made our schools safer, and their actions offer starting points from which we can identify additional steps to be planned and implemented over the next five years
4. Partnership and collaboration at the State level should mirror what is happening in our schools and communities so coordination with transparency, accountability, and good stewardship of resources occurs.
5. A proactive approach to school safety promotes positive learning environments for all students and staff in all schools and classrooms across North Carolina.
6. Prevention defines our overarching philosophy as we recognize that violence in our schools exists on a continuum with disciplinary problems often serving as precursors to more violent incidents.
7. Protection, response, and recovery plans and efforts already exist in many schools and communities, and the State should be positioned to assist with the further development and implementation of these plans and efforts when needed.
8. Data-driven decisions and evidence-based practices should characterize school safety efforts so that all schools are safe for everyone, and the vision of this Action Plan is realized.

VISION:

Through a Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child (WSCC) approach, every school in North Carolina will be a safe school where all students can learn, all teachers can teach, and all school staff can do their work without any concerns for their well-being.

GOAL 1: Promote Positive Learning Environments

OBJECTIVE 1.1

Foster a positive climate

Initiatives:

1.1.1 Support public school units (PSUs) in their development of policies and procedures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and future communicable diseases by continuing to integrate the newest evidence in the public health guidance, such as the StrongSchools NC toolkit, and sharing PPE with K-12 school staff, teachers, and students.

1.1.2 Support the ongoing implementation of the Hope4Healers Helpline to serve teachers, school personnel and their families. The Helpline will connect educators and school staff with a licensed mental health professional to provide support, as school personnel work through the Coronavirus pandemic. **[Completed]**

1.1.3 Empower students, parents and community members in decision-making around school policing by creating positive change through actionable involvement in school safety conversations, planning, developing tools to monitor and provide feedback on the work of School Resource Officers (SROs), and training design; level of involvement to be determined by the appropriateness of age/grade.

1.1.4 Promote evidence-based programs that emphasize character education as part of school violence prevention efforts.

1.1.5 Provide evidence-based resources and technical assistance for schools to create a positive school climate and culture of connectedness.

1.1.6 Adopt evidence-based, universal, supplemental, and intensive social and emotional learning (SEL) and mental health strategies that promote cognitive and socioemotional development and increase connectedness to schools and peers, in PK-12 classrooms.

1.1.7 Encourage the use a variety of data sources from the community and within the school, including school climate surveys, Youth Risk Behavior Surveys, exclusionary discipline in schools, and school-based referrals to the juvenile courts, to determine the specific needs of the school and the community environmental factors that affect student learning capacity. **[Completed]**

1.1.8 Use comprehensive social and emotional learning strategies (such as CASEL Core Competencies) to strengthen student skills regarding appropriate media resource/outlet use, including the ability to recognize and report cyberbullying. Adopt policies, such as school climate initiatives, support for digital citizenship and character development, as additional preventative efforts. Consider ways for students to lead efforts, when appropriate, to address the importance of peer influence. Use appropriate systems to monitor social media and mechanisms for reporting cyberbullying incidents.

1.1.9 Continue to educate local schools and school systems regarding the harmful impacts of bullying; seek evidence-based solutions for bullying prevention.

1.1.10 Facilitate the presence of diverse adult role models at local schools. Promote family/community engagement and volunteer programs. **[Completed]**

OBJECTIVE 1.2

Implement effective strategies to address student misconduct and connect at-risk youth with appropriate services

Initiatives:

1.2.1 Engage professionals from various disciplines (such as law enforcement, education, social work, mental health) to develop a best practices model for distinguishing the difference between harmful behavior and high-risk conduct. Include results as a part of School Resource Officer (SRO) training and training of educators.

1.2.2 Convene stakeholders from each jurisdiction via School Justice Partnerships for dialogue about how to partner and cooperate to address the “school-to-prison pipeline.”

- 1.2.3 Adopt proactive tiered social, emotional, and behavioral supports to establish a climate that appropriately supports and responds to student behavior.
- 1.2.4 Encourage schools to put in place more effective alternatives to suspension by adopting evidence-based practices, such as restorative justice and PBIS (Positive Behavior Intervention and Support), to foster positive school environments.
- 1.2.5 Empower local youth violence prevention planning bodies to integrate services through collaboration and encourage the use of mixed funding streams.
- 1.2.6 Work to expand training resources for court counselors and community program providers/staff in areas related to school safety. For court staff, develop specialized training modules on the recognition and reporting of risk behaviors and warning signs that could lead to school violence; actively engage court counselors in student support teams throughout the state.
- 1.2.7 Continue to educate police chiefs, sheriffs, LME-MCOs, and other local entities as to the benefits of crisis intervention training (CIT) and how various sites are identifying resources for the training and materials, as well as provide technical assistance regarding best practices for implementing CIT programs.
- 1.2.8 Continue to increase the number of beds and services for youth at crisis and assessment centers, which can better assess a child's needs and create smoother transitions back into schools and communities.

OBJECTIVE 1.3

Expand access to mental and behavioral health resources for students

Initiatives:

- 1.3.1 Support additional funding for Specialized Instructional Support Personnel (SISP) that provide student mental and behavioral health support in schools and encourage training about SISP roles for those who interact with them in schools. **[Completed]**
- 1.3.2 Increase student awareness of mental health, how to support self- wellness, and how to seek care. This can be accomplished by strengthening implementation and integration of two NC Standard Course of Study resources, 1) Healthful Living Mental and Emotional Health Standards, and

2) Guidance Socio-Emotional Essential Standards, into content areas of instruction as well as supporting the use of Signs of Suicide in schools.

1.3.3 Provide training on Youth Mental Health First Aid to all public school personnel and SROs to recognize signs and symptoms of mental illness (mental health literacy).

1.3.4 Support standardized uniform training for school nurses who provide evidence-based school nursing services to improve student mental, physical and behavioral health.

1.3.5 Develop and implement plan to improve communication and coordination between youth and their families and community agencies serving them (schools, providers, DJJDP, DSS) by providing Technical Assistance and support to NC SOC Collaboratives. Foster broader training and implementation of System of Care (SOC) throughout North Carolina.

1.3.6 Promote the utilization of technology, including a statewide electronic documentation system for Specialized Instructional Support Personnel (SISP), to document student physical, mental and behavioral health services provided in schools.

1.3.7 Provide funding and support for training of school workforce in Youth Mental Health First Aid

GOAL 2: Prevent Incidents of School Violence from Occurring

OBJECTIVE 2.1

Encourage information sharing and the use of best practices

Initiatives:

2.1.1 Improve school violence incident data collection and data sharing and transparency so that education and law enforcement officials at the state level have a consistent set of definitions and data to use as they work together on future safe school efforts. Explore collecting and reporting “averted school violence incident” data to identify prevention strategies that work in North Carolina.

2.1.2 Develop a public education campaign that educates about the importance of safe firearm storage.

- 2.1.3 Produce an Annual Report on School Safety in North Carolina.
- 2.1.4 Maintain a web-based resource center of current funding sources available to schools for school safety initiatives.
- 2.1.5 Serve as a repository for best practices and provide information and technical assistance to schools and the general public. **[Completed]**
- 2.1.6 Encourage and recognize the implementation of school safety best practices by creating a safe school certification program for schools that meet certain safety requirements, such as creating emergency plans and holding emergency drills. Encourage LEAs to update or create drills that can be conducted safely while meeting the public health requirements in place as a result of COVID-19.
- 2.1.7 Collaboratively conduct at the state level regular reviews of policy making, legislative documents, and activities related to school safety.

OBJECTIVE 2.2

Improve reporting and assessment of concerning behavior and suspicious activity

Initiatives

- 2.2.1 Continue implementation of the Say Something Anonymous Reporting System in middle and high schools and assess its impact.
- 2.2.2 Develop NC specific threat assessment guide which includes resources and model policies.
- 2.2.3 Establish multidisciplinary school Threat Assessment Teams (TATs) consisting of highly trained school professionals and certified personnel from a variety of different disciplines. Encourage TATs to coordinate with behavioral health providers.
- 2.2.4 Develop and provide a comprehensive screening tool to be used by school threat assessment teams to evaluate students on an individual basis and allow schools to take personalized preventive action.
- 2.2.5 Establish comprehensive targeted violence prevention programs supported by multi-disciplinary threat assessment teams as outlined in the U.S. Secret Service guide, Enhancing School Safety Using a Threat Assessment Model: An Operational Guide for Preventing Targeted School Violence.

GOAL 3: Protect Students, Teachers, and Staff from Incidents of School Violence

OBJECTIVE 3.1

Enhance physical security and reduce unauthorized access to school campuses

Initiatives:

3.1.1 Continue development of a facility vulnerability assessment tool for use by school districts.

3.1.2 Explore current practices involving Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) in the construction of schools that are being built or renovated. Consider the development of code specifications that recognize a “security certification” for schools that meet certain requirements.

3.1.3 Provide schools with model policies for conducting searches for weapons and drugs.

3.1.4 Ensure training provided to bus drivers includes the following topics: disability awareness, behaviors commonly associated with the most prevalent mental health disabilities of school age children, processes and procedures to deescalate disruptive/unsafe behaviors, building relationships, and engaging in appropriate interactions with students.

OBJECTIVE 3.2

Ensure School Resource Officers (SROs) are equipped with the knowledge and resources to meet the needs of the schools to which they are assigned

Initiatives

3.2.1 Continue to enhance SRO training by incorporating material focused on Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) **[Completed]**

3.2.2 Implement a robust school-to-prison pipeline education program within the SRO curriculum that addresses how exclusionary discipline practices disproportionately impact youth of color in North Carolina, the overrepresentation of youth of color in the criminal justice system, the lived experience of youth involved in the juvenile justice system, and the way SROs can have a positive impact on students and their communities. **[Completed]**

3.2.3 Update SRO training with the following topics: mental health, cultural competency, disability awareness, trauma, and building relationships/ interacting with students. **[Completed]**

3.2.4 Revise the Basic SRO training to include updated topics on de-escalation, procedural justice, explicit and implicit biases training, and ethical and effective problem-solving. **[Completed]**

3.2.5 Improve the annual SRO census so that schools and local law enforcement agencies coordinate their responses and address funding, assignment to schools/assignment sharing, and appropriate law enforcement agency designation.

OBJECTIVE 3.3

Foster positive relationships and improve information sharing between schools and law enforcement

Initiatives

3.3.1 Support FERPA training for all school and law enforcement personnel. Include a component of parental/family awareness regarding FERPA and its exceptions.

3.3.2 Improve information sharing within the interpretation of FERPA and HIPAA guidelines to allow sharing of critical information with agencies that have jurisdiction over programs that can be beneficial to children. This can include, but is not limited to, additional training as well as the improved sharing of information and data from school to school and the court system to the schools.

3.3.3 Promote the use of model memoranda of understanding (MOUs) by SRO programs. Such MOUs should be current and should delineate the roles and responsibilities of school personnel and SROs as they work together and specify to the extent possible the fine line that separates school discipline from statute enforcement and who has responsibility for each in school settings.

3.3.4 Ensure that all school personnel are trained on the role and proper use of SROs, including how to work collaboratively with them.

3.3.5 Encourage law enforcement officers to maintain high visibility around schools through safety checks, cultivate relationships with school personnel and students, and share with school personnel information regarding school security issues.

3.3.6 Encourage both school administrators and law enforcement to review and implement where appropriate and feasible the recommendations outlined by the Task Force for Racial Equity in Criminal Justice that focus on building positive relationships between schools and law enforcement. **[Completed]**

3.3.7 Promote meetings at least annually between juvenile court counselling staff, school administrators, and SROs from their jurisdiction to review data on the number of school-based referrals and how alternatives to criminal justice involvement can be explored in their community. **[Completed]**

GOAL 4: Strengthen Capability for Effective Responses to Incidents of School Violence

OBJECTIVE 4.1

Decrease the time it takes for responders to arrive on scene

Initiatives

4.1.1 Enhance law enforcement training to reflect best practices and prepare law enforcement agencies for immediate “no wait” active shooter response. This includes scenarios involving a single responder to an active shooter incident. **[Completed]**

4.1.2 Encourage the expansion of emergency response capabilities in rural areas to address minimal law enforcement coverage and longer response times during an incident.

4.1.3 Implement viable options supporting a statewide school panic alarm solution.

OBJECTIVE 4.2

Implement active shooter preparedness and mitigation initiatives for school personnel

Initiatives

- 4.2.1 Study requiring basic school security and/or active shooter preparedness training as part of the state's teacher certification requirements.
- 4.2.2 Determine if all schools are conducting active shooter training and exercises for staff on a recurring basis as well as age-appropriate active shooter training for students.
- 4.2.3 Assess school response capabilities and mitigation strategies to determine training and resource needs. **[Completed]**

OBJECTIVE 4.3

Strengthen coordination between schools and responders

Initiatives

- 4.3.1 Train SROs to instruct students and school personnel how to respond in an active shooter crisis and strategies to implement as the initial responders to help mitigate casualties. **[Completed]**
- 4.3.2 Develop guidance about active shooter drills with emphasis placed upon the involvement of all local entities who would respond to an incident: local schools, law enforcement agencies, and emergency responders. Include information about the incident command system approach as well as instructions for monitoring and reporting drills.
- 4.3.3 Continue to conduct outreach, train, and educate schools about the School Risk Management Planning application.
- 4.3.4 Conduct a needs assessment to determine what is needed to ensure interoperability of local law enforcement and school communications equipment.

