



REPORT OF THE EMERGENCY TASK FORCE ON SCHOOL SAFETY AND SECURITY

A NEW CULTURE OF SAFETY

REPRESENTATIVE TERRI COLLINS, CHAIR



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Task Force Members

- **Chair:** Terri Collins, Alabama State Representative, District 8; Chair of the House Education Policy Committee
- **Vice Chair:** Scott Pilgreen, State Fire Marshal
- Jenna Bedsole, Attorney, appointed by the Alabama Law Institute
- Erica Bozeman, appointed by the Alabama Law Enforcement Agency
- Jeff Byard, appointed by the Alabama Emergency Management Agency
- Dick Brewbaker, Alabama State Senator, District 25; Chair of the Senate Education Committee
- Curt Carpenter, appointed by the Alabama Tactical Officers Association
- Kathy Carson, appointed by the Alabama Association of Emergency Managers
- Philip Cleveland, Interim Superintendent of Education
- Jim Cunningham, Fort Payne City Schools Superintendent, appointed by the Alabama School Superintendents Association
- Greg DeJarnett, appointed by the Department of Education
- Joanne Hale, Secretary of Information Technology
- Cary Hill, appointed by the Alabama Department of Mental Health
- Cindy Jackson, appointed by the Alabama School Boards Association
- Jay Jones, Sheriff of Lee County, appointed by the Alabama Sheriffs Association
- Joseph McPhillips, Educator, appointed by the Governor
- Rudolph Munnerlyn, appointed by the Alabama Association of Police Chiefs
- Pamela Revels, School Resource Officer, Lee County, appointed by the Alabama Association of School Resource Officers
- Emily Rich, President of the Alabama School Counselors Association
- Art Rousseau, appointed by the Alabama Community College System

Introduction

During the 2016 Regular Session, the Legislature adopted House Joint Resolution 19 to establish the Emergency Task Force on School Safety and Security to accomplish the following three objectives:

- Complete a comprehensive review and assessment of state laws, regulations, protocols, and minimum standards in place concerning school safety and security.
- Identify gaps in school safety and security that need to be addressed.
- Submit recommendations for immediate, achievable, legislative actions to the Speaker of the House of Representatives, the President Pro Tempore of the Senate, and the appropriate legislative committees to ensure that public schools across the state are as safe, secure, and protected as possible.

Recognizing that advancements in technology and significant cultural shifts in society have impacted how school safety and security should be approached, the task force carefully examined existing laws, regulations, protocols, and practices relating to school security and safety and formed subgroups to examine specific areas pertinent to school safety, including the following:

- Minimum standards;
- Partnership and training;
- Notification; and
- Best practices.

Drawing upon the breadth of school safety and security experience of the members of the task force, as well as reaching out to additional resources in the state covering numerous disciplines, and using the information and results of past School Safety Task Forces, the task force identified specific areas for change and formulated strategic steps to enhance the safety of students and educators statewide without significantly impacting academic achievement. Some of the identified strategies enhancing safety and security will require legislative action, while others will require policy and practice modifications at the state and local levels. The central goal of the task force is to encourage the adoption of a “new culture of safety” in which the mindset of how educators, students, parents, law enforcement, and other relevant entities view safety and security in schools is meaningfully transformed.

The task force recognizes that implementation of many of the recommendations in this report will require funding from the Legislature.

Minimum Standards for Safety

The Subgroup on Minimum Standards convened to study and evaluate the standards and practices necessary to ensure the safety of children in Alabama school districts. The group evaluated safety-related standards currently in place for law enforcement officers and school resource officers, emergency operation procedures in place in local school districts, fire codes, statutory requirements, and other pertinent standards and determined if these standards were in need of update or modification or if adoption of certain new standards would enhance school safety.

Fire Codes

After review of the relevant fire codes affecting school safety, the State Fire Marshal and this subgroup determined that there were no gaps in the fire code as currently written that would compromise student safety. The task force as a whole opined that safety in schools also is contingent upon the maintenance of certain basic security infrastructure, such as locks, sprinklers, fire alarms, etc.

Emergency Operation Plans (EOPs)

The subgroup focused on emergency operation plans (EOPs) in place for utilization by school districts. Although Alabama is up-to-date on federal school safety requirements for EOPs, the subgroup noted that some of the procedures could be simplified for better understanding and application in emergency situations. The subgroup discussed the possibility of providing a brochure to each school district explaining EOPs in detail, put in simple terms, to encourage proper application of the procedures.

Safety Planning and Response Cards (SPARC) and Drills

The subgroup also discussed the distribution of a simplified card summarizing the necessary steps to take when a school facility is placed on lockdown. The subgroup reviewed a Safety Planning and Response Card (SPARC) that is used in some school districts and which contains simplified instructions for proper action during emergencies. The SPARC cards have been enthusiastically received by school staff and law enforcement officers. After discussing safety drills and other safety preparedness measures, such as active shooter drills, the subgroup determined that, while some minimum standards are appropriate, the standardization of drills was not the best approach. Local school districts are in the best position to formulate a plan for effective safety drills that reflect the unique characteristics and configuration of member schools. The committee did note that local school districts should consider special needs students when preparing a plan for safety drills.

Local Safety Coordinators

Upon continued review of standards to maximize school safety in light of technological advances and other cultural shifts, the subgroup concluded that school safety could be significantly enhanced if each school district designates a Safety Coordinator to serve as a resource to students and school staff in preparation and development of the EOP for times of crisis, which could enhance communication during emergency situations. The Safety Coordinator should be included in the State Employee Education Directory. The group suggested that the individual appointed as Safety Coordinator attend no less than two state mandated trainings per year related to school safety. Each Safety Coordinator should also be required to coordinate

annual safety training for school resource officers, law enforcement, and first responders for compliance monitoring purposes.

School Resource Officers

The subgroup recognized the importance of the role of school resources officers in school safety. The statutory definition and related standards relating to school resource officers appear to be accurate and up-to-date. The subgroup identified specific training concerns for school resource officers which are discussed in the next section of this report. The subgroup concluded that it is important that each school have a school resource officer on location. Given the budgetary challenges the state is currently facing, the subgroup recognized that the placement of school resource officers in each school may prove difficult, but is hopeful that a budgetary strategy could be developed by the Legislature.

Recommendations by the Subgroup on Minimum Standards for Safety:

- ❖ Designate an individual as a Safety Coordinator in each local school district, with a requirement that the coordinator attend two safety-related trainings per year.
- ❖ Require local school districts to develop simplified Emergency Operating Plans that comply with guidelines provided by the Department of Education.
- ❖ Encourage local school districts to distribute brochures for school personnel summarizing emergency operating plans.
- ❖ Encourage local school districts to use the Safety Planning and Response Card (SPARC) with instructions for responses to emergencies.
- ❖ Provide a funding strategy to increase the number of school resource officers as a priority.

Partnerships and Safety-Related Training

The Subgroup on Partnership and Training convened to examine current safety-related training offered to law enforcement officers, school resource officers, school personnel, students, parents, and other relevant persons or entities. The subgroup was tasked with making achievable recommendations for enhancing training to facilitate safer school environments. The subgroup also examined communication and partnerships between all education stakeholders and how this notably impacts and enhances safety.

Training for School Personnel

The subgroup catalogued existing safety training opportunities for school personnel and noted that three regional safety trainings were scheduled to occur later in the year. These regional trainings were the result of a federal grant designed to improve school safety. Teacher training was identified as a paramount concern for the enhancement of student safety. Teachers should be kept abreast of information and strategies to address crisis and safety concerns which empower them to act responsively during critical situations.

Training for Students and Parents

In addition to teacher safety training, the subgroup determined that students and parents are in need of safety training. The subgroup discussed providing active training for parents at PTA meetings and providing students with appropriate, detailed safety information in student handbooks. Empowering students and parents in the proactive process of reporting safety issues, as well as responding to crisis situations, is a critical component of safety.

Training for Law Enforcement Officers

Much of law enforcement training appears to translate effectively to responding to school safety-related incidents. However, the subgroup determined that it would be beneficial for the Department of Education to work with the Alabama Peace Officers' Standards and Training Commission to develop training for law enforcement officers specific to school emergency operation plans. Command level staff should receive annual, curriculum-specific training regarding responding to school emergencies, as well as training to enhance familiarity and proper utilization of Virtual Alabama.¹

Training for First Responders

Similar to training for law enforcement officers, the subgroup determined that it would be beneficial for career and volunteer first responders to receive annual training regarding effective responses to school safety-related incidents. The training should be developed specific to school emergency operation plans, with career and volunteer first responders receiving annual, curriculum-specific training regarding responding to school emergencies, as well as training to enhance familiarity and proper utilization of Virtual Alabama. The training for school resource officers, discussed in the following subsection, should be coordinated with the training for first responders recommended in this subsection to avoid duplication of costs and training efforts.

Training for School Resource Officers

With regard to school resource officers (SROs), there are no specific uniform state standards for training. However, the National Association of School Resource Officers provides a detailed, forty-hour training regimen for school resource officers. This training curriculum could serve as a resource for the development of specific SRO standards in Alabama by the Alabama Peace Officers' Standards and Training Commission, in collaboration with the Department of Education.

Development of Partnerships to Foster Safety

The subgroup concluded that the lynchpin of safety in schools is effective communication among all of the interested parties—effective communication between all school personnel, law enforcement, first responders, the state, students, parents, and the media. Building an open network of communication among these parties is imperative for successful responses to emergency situations in schools. Local school districts should provide intentional invitations to first responders for lunch, tours, and other activities on school property, especially during safety-related drills, to enhance the familiarity of first responders with the school premises and to foster relationships between school personnel and first responders. Moreover,

¹ Virtual Alabama is a project of the Alabama Department of Homeland Security using 3D visualization to facilitate common operating pictures and situational awareness needed by Alabama's first responders to protect lives and safeguard citizens before, during, and after a disaster.

development of a network of collaboration between first responders and local school districts in EOP development and implementation would significantly enhance safety in schools.

Recommendations of the Subgroup on Partnerships and Training:

- ❖ Require the Department of Education to develop safety specific training for teachers.
- ❖ Require the Department of Education to develop safety awareness guidelines for students and parents.
- ❖ Require the Alabama Peace Officers' Standards and Training Commission, in cooperation with the Department of Education, to develop annual training for law enforcement officers specific to school emergency operation plans and proper utilization of Virtual Alabama.
- ❖ Require annual training for career and volunteer first responders specific to school emergency operation plans and proper utilization of Virtual Alabama.
- ❖ Encourage local school districts to foster an open network of communication and partnership among school personnel, law enforcement, first responders, the state, students, parents, and the media regarding issues affecting school safety.
- ❖ Require collaboration between first responders and local school districts in EOP development and implementation.
- ❖ Require local school systems to invite first responders to visit schools regularly and to actively participate in school programs.
- ❖ Require the Department of Education and the Alabama Peace Officers' Standards and Training Commission to develop uniform training standards for school resource officers.

Safety Notification

The Subgroup on Notification convened to evaluate current notification systems used by the state and local school districts with regard to notification of potential or existing emergencies or safety issues. The subgroup identified the following four types of notification relating to safety and security:

- The state to local law enforcement and schools.
- Local school districts to parents.
- Notification within a school.
- Schools to the Department of Education.

After discussion and evaluation, the subgroup determined that notification from the state to law enforcement agencies is meeting and exceeding expectations and that no action was needed to change these systems. The subgroup concluded that it should carefully examine how schools notify parents of emergencies and safety risks, how faculty and staff within a local school communicate with one another inside a school regarding emergencies and safety risks, as well as how schools communicate information relating to emergencies and safety to the Department of Education.

Following these determinations, the subgroup formulated the following two-step action plan:

Step One. Identify Notification Systems. It is critical to identify which notification systems are used by local school districts throughout the state.

Step Two. Identify Successful Schools. Identification and review of notification systems that have proved successful, including procedures and protocol regarding use of the systems, would serve as a benchmark for informing other local school districts which systems to use, as well as how to implement the use of those systems.

A survey was prepared by the Department of Education to send to superintendents across the state to determine what notification systems were being used by local school districts. The Notifications Subgroup is awaiting results from the survey. The subgroup concluded that local school districts, guided by the Department of Education, should implement notification systems that use the best technology for providing accurate and succinct information to parents during times of crises. The subgroup also recognized that funding constraints may impair the implementation of notification systems in certain school districts.

The subgroup learned that the Information Technology Division of the Department of Education had developed a computer notification system designed to allow schools to input specific information relating to school delays, early releases, shelter in place information, etc. The information would be compiled in one location, facilitating the department's ability to keep the Governor up-to-date regarding critical developments in schools across the state. Although the system is complete and ready for utilization, it has not yet been implemented for actual use. This system would enhance communication between local school districts and the state regarding emergencies and other situations in which circumstances and the need for action are rapidly changing moment by moment. Implementation of this system would significantly facilitate communication between local school districts and the state during times of crisis.

The subgroup also determined that NOAA weather radios are now used for all hazards, not just serious weather threats. However, many schools do not regularly use this emergency preparedness tool or are using it improperly. Required use and training relating to weather radios would foster better preparedness in schools for weather and other emergency-related events threatening the safety of students.

Recommendations by the Subgroup on Notification:

- ❖ Require the Department of Education through legislation to implement the computer notification system as the central point of intake of emergency and other information from local school districts for use by the department.²
- ❖ Encourage local school districts, in consultation with the Department of Education, to implement notification systems utilizing the best technology for facilitating communication between the school and parents.
- ❖ Require the Department of Education to provide training for local school districts regarding the optimal use of notification systems.

² This requirement is included in the draft legislation attached to the report as Appendix B.

- ❖ Work with the Legislature and the Office of Information Technology to provide funding for local school districts to implement notification systems with the best technology.
- ❖ Encourage the Department of Education to provide training for local school districts regarding the proper use of NOAA weather radios.

Best Practices for School Safety

The Subgroup on Best Practices for School Safety convened to review the task force recommendations in order to develop viable, comprehensive best practices for implementation by local school districts. The subgroup determined that these safety and security best practices should encompass a wide range of school safety areas and should be in a format that is both easy to use and that provides practical methods for schools to evaluate their safety programs.

The safety and security best practices are organized into the following five program areas:

- Effectiveness and efficiency;
- Safety planning and training;
- Discipline practices and code of student conduct;
- School climate and community outreach; and
- Facilities and equipment.

A sample comprehensive checklist developed by this subgroup identifying school safety and security best practices that could be used by local school districts is attached as Appendix A.³

Recommendations by the Subgroup on Best Practices for School Safety

- ❖ Encourage the Department of Education to distribute to local school districts a “School Safety and Security Best Practices” checklist that identifies comprehensive best practices to enhance school safety and security.

Statutory Updates Relating to School Safety

The task force as a whole, as well as its subgroups, reviewed relevant sections of the Code of Alabama 1975, to determine if any of these sections needed updating to adequately address safety or if there were any specific gaps in the statutory framework for school safety.

³ The School Safety and Security Best Practices Checklist is modeled after the checklist developed by the Florida Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability (OPPAGA), an office of the Florida Legislature. See Report No. 03-63.

The task force first identified Section 12-15-217, Code of Alabama 1975, relating to notice to schools regarding delinquent acts of juveniles, as a section for modification. Pursuant to this section, the juvenile court is required to notify the superintendent of the school system the juvenile attends if he or she has been found delinquent for an action that would be a crime. The superintendent may share the information with the relevant principal, who may, in turn, share the information with teachers and other staff in order to appropriately work with the student or protect other staff or students from potential harm.

Juvenile probation officers are in a unique position post-adjudication to monitor the progress of a juvenile delinquent and may have pertinent information that would assist the school in addressing the needs of the student or to adequately assess the safety of staff or other students. It is unclear under Section 12-15-217 and existing law if, and to what extent, probation officers may share information with schools. Section 12-15-217 could be amended to expressly provide for the sharing of information between schools and probation officers.

The task force also identified Section 13A-11-72, Code of Alabama 1975, as a potential impediment to school safety. This section makes it a Class C felony for a person to “knowingly **with intent to do bodily harm** carry or possess a deadly weapon on the premises of a public school.” (emphasis added.) The statute includes exceptions for law enforcement officers, school resource officers, and other security personnel employed by a local school district. The statute also exempts those persons with a concealed pistol permit from the prohibition. Although this section properly prohibits the possession of deadly weapons on the premises of a public school, it erroneously ties possession to “intent to do bodily harm.” Intent to do bodily harm should be irrelevant to this prohibition.

Section 13A-11-72, Code of Alabama 1975, could be amended to simply strike the words “with intent to do bodily harm” to remedy misapplication of this section.

These statutory changes are included in draft legislation attached to this report as Appendix B.

Recommendations for Statutory Changes:

- ❖ Amend Section 12-15-217, Code of Alabama 1975, to provide for the sharing of information between juvenile probation officers and school districts relating to delinquent students that may pose a threat to safety.
- ❖ Amend Section 13A-11-72, Code of Alabama 1975, to clarify that the prohibition for carrying a deadly weapon on the premises of a public school is prohibited.

Summary of Task Force Recommendations

- ❖ Require local school districts to develop simplified Emergency Operating Plans that comply with guidelines provided by the Department of Education.
- ❖ Encourage local school districts to distribute brochures for school personnel summarizing emergency operating plans.
- ❖ Encourage local school districts to use the Safety Planning and Response Card (SPARC) with instructions for responses to emergencies.
- ❖ Provide a funding strategy to increase the number of school resource officers as a priority.
- ❖ Designate an individual as a Safety Coordinator in each local school district, with a requirement that the coordinator attend two safety related trainings per year.
- ❖ Require the Department of Education to develop safety specific training for teachers.
- ❖ Require the Department of Education to develop safety awareness guidelines for students and parents.
- ❖ Require the Alabama Peace Officers' Training Commission, in cooperation with the Department of Education, to develop annual training for law enforcement officers specific to school emergency operation plans and proper utilization of Virtual Alabama.
- ❖ Require annual training for career and volunteer first responders specific to school emergency operation plans and proper utilization of Virtual Alabama.
- ❖ Encourage local school districts to foster an open network of communication and partnership between school personnel, law enforcement, first responders, the state, students, parents, and the media regarding issues affecting school safety.
- ❖ Require collaboration between first responders and local school districts in EOP development and implementation.
- ❖ Require local school systems to invite first responders to visit schools regularly and to actively participate in school programs.
- ❖ Require the Department of Education and the Alabama Peace Officers' Training Commission to develop uniform training standards for school resource officers.
- ❖ Require the Department of Education through legislation to implement the computer notification system as the central point of intake of emergency and other information from local school districts for use by the department.
- ❖ Encourage local school districts, in consultation with the Department of Education, to implement notification systems utilizing the best technology for facilitating communication between the school and parents.
- ❖ Require the Department of Education to provide training to local school districts regarding the optimal use of notification systems.
- ❖ Work with the Legislature and the Office of Information Technology to provide funding for local school districts to implement notification systems with the best technology.

- ❖ Encourage the Department of Education to provide training to local school districts regarding the proper use of NOAA weather radios.
- ❖ Encourage the Department of Education to distribute to local school districts a “School Safety and Security Best Practices” checklist that identifies comprehensive best practices to enhance school safety and security.
- ❖ Amend Section 12-15-217, Code of Alabama 1975, to provide for the sharing of information between juvenile probation officers and school districts relating to delinquent students that may pose a threat to safety.
- ❖ Amend Section 13A-11-72, Code of Alabama 1975, to clarify that the prohibition for carrying a deadly weapon on the premises of a public school is prohibited.