School Safety and Security

School safety refers to the physical and psychological well-being of students and school staff, and requires attention to precursors of violence, including prevention, early intervention, and recovery strategies.[1] School safety is multi-faceted and should be addressed with input from the students, parents, staff, local law enforcement, and community members.[2]

School Safety Across the United States

From 2020 to 2024, there were **41** school shootings incidents in Georgia, with 31 victims wounded and 8 killed.[3]

The percentage of public schools reporting cyberbullying incidents **more than doubled** between 2010 and 2020, even while in-person bullying decreased.[4]

Students aged 12-18 were almost **twice as likely** to report being afraid of attack or harm at school than away from school during the school year in 2019.[5]

During 2021-2022, **49%** of public schools reported providing diagnostic mental health assessments and **38%** reported providing treatment to students for mental health disorders. These percentages were lower than the percentages reported in 2019-2020.[6]

What Georgia Students Say About Their Safety at School[7]

- **57%** reported students at their school fight a lot
- **36%** reported being bullied or threatened in the past 30 days
- **45%** reported feeling unsafe at school in the past 30 days
- **38%** disagreed that they know an adult at school they could talk to if they need help
- **23%** disagreed that they know what to do if there is an emergency at school

School Violence

What is school violence? [12]

Bullying

Fighting

Sexual violence

School shootings

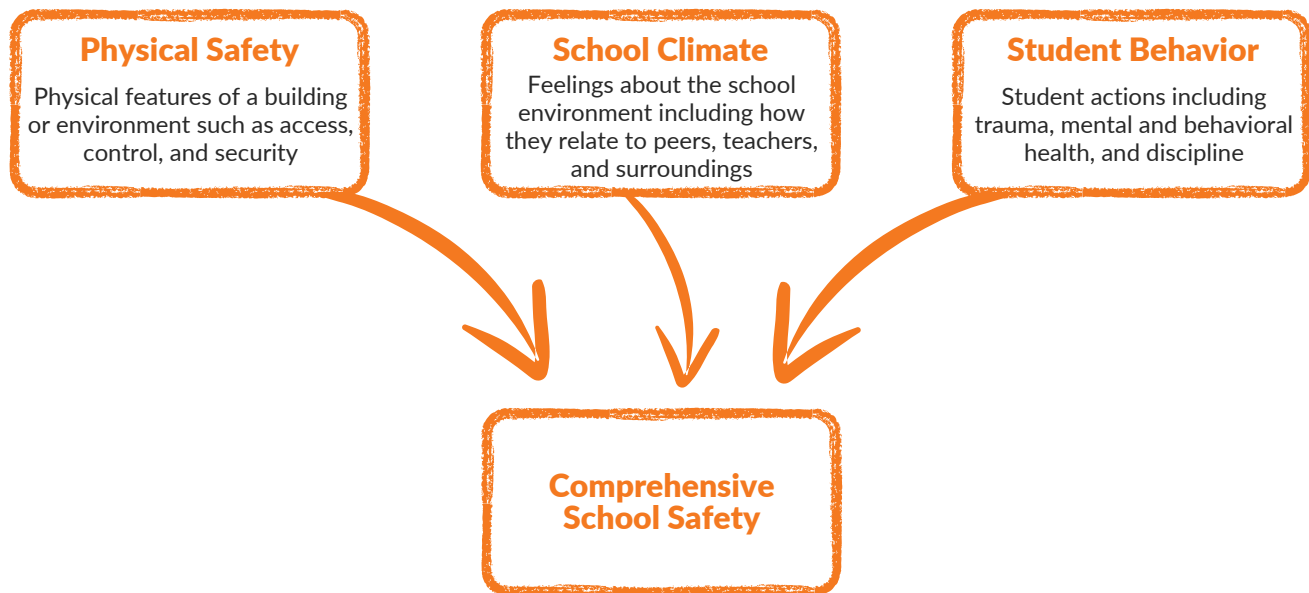**What causes school violence?** [12]

1. Delinquent peer associations
2. Antisocial attitudes and behavior
3. Negative and/or violence school setting

Youth who experience violence tend to: [9, 10]

- Have worse academic and psychosocial outcomes
- Report higher rates of behavioral and mental health problems
- Be more likely to experience academic difficulties and future violence victimization and/or perpetration
- Skip or drop out of school

Most school violence is predictable and preventable. To prevent and/or mitigate violence, schools, and communities must develop and implement a comprehensive school safety framework that is multifaceted, tailored to the school and community context, and involves members of the school, community, police, juvenile justice, and mental health response teams. [11]

National Institute of Justice Comprehensive School Safety Framework

Physical Safety

Physical features of a building or environment such as access, control, and security

School Climate

Feelings about the school environment including how they relate to peers, teachers, and surroundings

Student Behavior

Student actions including trauma, mental and behavioral health, and discipline

Comprehensive School Safety

How Georgia is Working to Keep Schools Safe

The following are some examples of Georgia's efforts to ensure school safety:[i]

School Safety Plan: the state requires all schools to have a School Safety Plan that addresses each school's response to violence, threats, natural disasters, or other emergency situations that may occur [13]

School Safety Hotline: designed for crisis prevention, the School Safety Hotline allows students to anonymously pass on information relating to an unsafe situation in school (i.e., weapons violations, bomb threats, drugs or alcohol, bullying, etc.), initiating immediate and appropriate action [14]

Center for School Safety: an online school safety clearinghouse hosted by the Georgia Department of Education in collaboration with the Georgia Department of Emergency Management which offers links to trainings, events, laws and guidelines, and other resources for Georgia Schools and Community Partners [15]

Georgia Student Health Survey: an anonymous, statewide survey administered online each year to students in grades 3-12. Survey results assist in the identification of safety, climate, and health issues that impact student achievement and help guide school prevention and intervention strategies. [16]

School Climate Star Rating: a rating of a school's climate (on a 1-5 star scale) to help each school determine if they're on the correct path to improvement. The rating is based on data obtained from student, teacher, and parent surveys; student discipline; a safe and substance-free learning environment information; and attendance. [17]

K-12 Student Discipline Dashboard: a dashboard showing discipline data for all public schools (K-12), by school year, school district, school, and various subgroups [18]

Georgia Tiered-System of Supports for Students: provides a tiered system of supports for districts, schools, and students. The tiered system includes evidence-based interventions and screenings that will provide the different levels of support needed to maximize student achievement and reduce behavior problems. [19]

School Social Work: qualified professionals that are trained to analyze barriers to learning, assist with mental health and behavioral concerns, and provide positive behavioral, academic, and classroom support in consultation with teachers, parents, and administrators to promote student achievement. [20]

[i] For a complete list of Georgia's School Safety efforts, see https://www.gadoe.org/wholechild/Pages/default.aspx

Recommendations

Policymakers

- Continue to collaborate with Georgia Emergency Management and Homeland Security Agency to provide training, technical assistance, and other resources for school safety, including regular and mandatory trainings for School Resources Officers.
- Continue to fund school-based behavioral health programs, including Project AWARE, the Georgia Apex Program, and Mental Health First Aid.
- Provide additional funding to ensure adequate staffing levels of school-employed mental health professionals (i.e., school counselors, school psychologists, school social workers, and school nurses) to ensure that services are high quality, effective, and available to all students.

State Agencies and Schools

- Facilitate the sharing of current, robust, and timely student data among school systems, DOE, DJJ, juvenile courts, and other child-serving and public safety agencies to better identify needs, implement prevention strategies, and improve outcomes for Georgia youth.
- Continue to provide ongoing, high quality, relevant school safety training to all school staff and ensure that school safety planning includes representation from a wide variety of stakeholders (i.e., principals, teachers, parents, school resource officers, school-employed mental health professionals, and other specialized instructional support personnel).
- Integrate, when possible, the principles of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) when designing schools. These principles include information and formal means of access control; surveillance and the ability to be aware of one's entire surroundings; and territoriality, which is creating a sense of shared ownership and responsibility for a space.
- Regularly review Georgia Student Health Surveys and use disciplinary data (as reported by GOSA) to address a negative school climate and unfair treatment in school discipline and ensure that discipline policies are clear and applied consistently to all students.
- Continue to use of and build upon multi-tiered systems of supports, including PBIS, and integrate mental health and wellbeing programs and anti-bullying programs into curriculum.
- Provide access to mental health supports for all students and ensure that there are appropriate school-employed mental health professional to student ratios in all schools.
- *See additional recommendations on Voices' School-Based Mental Health factsheet*

Additional Resources to Make Schools Safer:

- Policy Recommendations for Implementing the Framework for Safe and Successful Schools
- Framework for Safe and Successful School Environments
- Position Statement: Safe and Supportive Schools

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