



# STATE POLICY ACTIONS TO IMPROVE SCHOOL SAFETY

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## IMPROVING SCHOOL SAFETY AND FOSTERING SAFE COMMUNITIES SHOULD BE A UNIFYING PRIORITY

Improving school safety and fostering safe communities where our children can thrive should be a unifying priority for all Americans. There is no single solution that will prevent every tragedy, but a series of policy recommendations can be adopted to improve school safety outcomes. By adopting school safety best practices, improving access to mental health services, and understanding the relationship between culture and violence, policymakers can help reduce gun violence and keep students safe.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STATE POLICYMAKERS

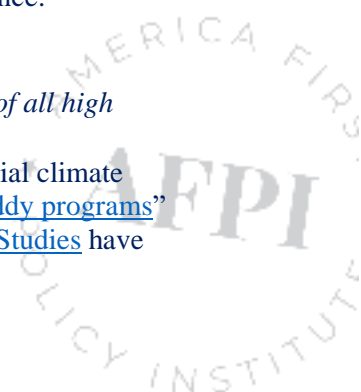
### 1. Adopting School Safety Best Practices

- From the [2000–2001 to 2021–2022 school years](#), there were 1,375 school shootings at public and private elementary and secondary schools, resulting in 515 deaths and 1,161 injuries.
- School districts should create consistent policies for the collection and sharing of Suspicious Activity Reporting, which allows for the collection, curation, and dissemination of vital information that can provide actionable intelligence. In the context of school safety, districts and individual schools should create systems for the consistent reporting of troubling student behavior, shareable in a common platform, to ensure that knowledge of a student exhibiting such behavior is accessible beyond his or her immediate academic environment.
- School leaders should keep school grounds inaccessible to unauthorized individuals by always locking gates and doors. If ingress or egress at an access point is necessary, such as at the beginning or end of the school day, those areas should be staffed by appropriate school personnel to ensure no unauthorized access. School leaders should employ School Resource Officers, who are often active or retired law enforcement officers, to carry the bulk of responsibility for responding to acts of school violence.
- State leaders should create incentive programs to encourage former law enforcement or military personnel to pursue careers in education. This would allow schools to augment their staffing with individuals with the experience and training to enhance overall school safety.
- State and school district leaders should partner to create an awareness campaign similar to “see something, say something” to create a culture of reporting suspicious behavior.
- State and school district leaders should be more transparent with parents about safety measures and best practices utilized within the schools.
- State leaders should encourage schools to adopt [technology](#) that enables school administrators to monitor such behavior on school-owned computer devices actively. State leaders should pursue federal grants that cover the costs of training school personnel and conduct school threat assessments to secure schools better and protect them against potential acts of violence.

### 2. Improving Access to Mental Health Services

In 2023, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported that [more than 40%](#) of all high school students experienced persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness.

- State education leaders should provide resources for schools to create a positive social climate and promote community among the student body. This could include initiating “[buddy programs](#)” and other relationship-building programs during recess, lunch, and other activities. [Studies](#) have



found that encouraging bonding and connectedness among staff and students is relevant to reducing gun violence in schools.

- State leaders should require school districts to partner with local mental healthcare providers to increase access to in-school services.
- State education departments should leverage all existing funding streams to ensure mental health services are available for students.

### 3. Understanding the Relationship Between Culture and Violence

According to a [2021 study](#), the rise in mass shooting events over recent years suggests a media contagion effect, whereby the media's coverage of these incidents promotes others to engage in copycat behavior.

- State leaders should consider adopting a [“No Notoriety” campaign](#) to cease mentioning the names or displaying the pictures of perpetrators of school violence and instead focus on the victims of these crimes.

[A 2016 study](#) found that out of a sample of 56 school shooters, only 18% grew up in a stable household with both biological [parents](#).

- Communities should promote a culture of fatherhood to enhance stability within the home and community. Present fathers who are active in their child's life can significantly affect the child's development.

The above policy recommendations serve as a basic starting point for where federal, state, and local policymakers can begin to immediately understand and address the issues of school safety and gun violence in our society.

To read the America First Policy Institute's full report on school safety, [click here](#).

