

10 Years after Columbine: Highlights of School Safety Efforts in Colorado

In the ten years following the Columbine High School tragedy, Colorado school safety has improved, thanks to the efforts of school leaders and their community partners, a number of organizations and state and private agencies ranging from the Colorado General Assembly to private foundations, citizens, and others. Here's a chronology of some key milestones contributing to improved school safety for Colorado students and schools:

1999

The Colorado Trust, with other partners, funded the Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence at the University of Colorado at Boulder for a six-year initiative called "Safe Communities – Safe Schools" program (1999-2005)

- Provided funding for statewide safe school planning efforts, yearly conferences, and supported sixteen pilot sites across the state.
- The Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence continued extensive research begun in 1996 to identify proven prevention programs known as the "Blueprints." Blueprints, available online, provide examples of violence prevention programs known to be successful.

The Colorado Attorney General's Office began publishing the *Colorado School Violence Prevention and Student Discipline Manual*.

- The manual is updated yearly and is an important resource for teachers and school officials who need to know the legal tools available to address the security problems posed by students who engage in violent or disruptive behavior or who use, possess, or distribute alcohol, drugs or weapons on school grounds. The manual's most recent update is available online at www.ago.state.co.us/safe_communities

State begins work to improve emergency services communications by issuing a request for proposals for a digital trunked radio network statewide.

2000

Columbine Review Commission is appointed by Governor Bill Owens in January 2000.

- Purpose of the Commission was to conduct an independent review of the tragedy and make recommendations to prevent further tragedies in the future

Colorado General Assembly passes the Safe Schools Act (C.R.S. 22-32-109.1). Highlights, including subsequent amendments, include

- Each school district board of education required to:

- adopt a mission statement and safe school plan that makes safety a priority in each public school.
- include a uniform and consistently enforced written conduct and discipline code in the safe schools plan.
- adopt a policy requiring school principals to report annually specified information concerning the learning environment in the school. These reports are submitted to the Department of Education.
- enter into agreements with law enforcement officials, the juvenile justice system, and social services to help maintain a safe school environment.
- have a written crisis management policy and procedures, and employee crisis management training
- adopt a policy requiring annual school building inspections for removal of barriers to safety
- adopt a policy to share and release information in accordance with state and federal guidelines related to a student in the interest of making schools safer
- adopt a policy to allow reasonable access of parents and board members to observe activities at a school with notice to administrative office
- adopt a policy for screening licensed and non-licensed employees
- establish a school response framework in compliance with the National Incident Management System – a model framework for responding to critical events
- adopt a policy for bullying prevention and education
- Provides for immunity of school boards, teachers or others acting in good faith to comply with conduct and discipline codes

The State Board of Education added compliance with the Safe School Act to the “Rules for the Administration of School District Accreditation.”

Colorado General Assembly passes Exchange of Information Related to Children – (HB 00-1119)

- Allows for information sharing between state agencies and schools when there is a need to know to better serve children or to protect school safety.
- The Colorado Attorney General’s office oversaw the HB-1119 Task Force, composed of representatives from school districts and state education-related agencies and organizations, law enforcement, district attorneys, social services and mental health organizations. Guidelines for negotiating information sharing agreements also are available online at www.ago.state.co.us/safe_communities Attorneys from the AG’s office provide training and advice to the local agencies mentioned above.

The Colorado Trust, Colorado Attorney General Ken Salazar, The Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence at the University of Colorado at Boulder, Coca Cola, Big Horn Center, Channel 9 News, and the Denver Post launch the Colorado Anti-Bullying Campaign (2000-2002).

- Effort included a kick-off event for the campaign, website, hotline, resources to raise awareness and provide assistance for bullying and harassment in schools.

Attorney General Ken Salazar and Professor Delbert Elliott from Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence at the Colorado University at Boulder toured 64 counties across the state and met with school and communities leaders and students to discuss school safety issues and provide individual guidance.

Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment created the Office of Suicide Prevention. Colorado's suicide rate ranked high among states; the office focused initial work on youth suicide prevention statewide.

Safe Communities-Safe Schools Conference, Boulder, May 2000

- Provided safe school information from experts to Colorado Schools

2001

Columbine Review Commission Report Issued, May 2001

- Ten recommendations were made
- Report is accessible at http://www.state.co.us/columbine/Columbine_20Report_WEB.pdf

The Colorado Association of School Resource Officers (CASRO) hosted the U. S. Secret Service research staff at their annual summer training conference

- The findings from their landmark study of school shooters and forthcoming threat assessment model recommendations were shared.

First phase of statewide digital trunked radio system launched.

2002

The Colorado Department of Education launched the Positive Behavior Support statewide initiative that creates positive school-wide climates for safe and civil learning environments. Colorado now has the third largest number of schools involved in such a statewide initiative, with more than 500 schools implementing this framework.

Safe Communities-Safe Schools Conference, Broomfield, May 2002

- Provided safe school information from experts to Colorado Schools

2003

Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment and The Colorado Trust develop and released the state's suicide prevention strategic plan.

Safe Communities-Safe Schools Conference, Broomfield, May, 2003

- Provided safe school information from experts to Colorado Schools

2004

Safe 2 Tell Reporting Hotline and Awareness Campaign was launched.

- Provides a safe and anonymous way to report concerns of safety, focusing on awareness and early intervention
- Safe2Tell is a 501c3 agency made possible by grants and funding from the Colorado Trust, the Daniels' Fund, El Pomar Foundation, corporations and private donors, with a multi-agency advisory board. Executive Director is Special Agent Susan Payne.
- Trained Colorado State Patrol emergency communications staff handle calls 24/7 and determine what action needs to be taken to help students, parents and school faculty facing a threat. Hundreds of planned acts of violence are averted.
- Has provided over 1,250 targeted presentations to students, school staff, community groups, law enforcement and others statewide since 2004.

2005

The Colorado Trust initiated a three-year, \$9 million grant program to fund evidence- and school-based bullying prevention efforts. Forty-five grantees estimate they reached 50,000 young people in 40 Colorado counties during the 2005 – 2008 project period.

Safe Communities-Safe Schools Conference, Westminster, April 2005

- Provided safe school information from experts to Colorado Schools

Full mutual aid capability created between state digital trunked radio system and Denver.

2006

Five Colorado areas (the counties of Pueblo, Mesa, Larimer, Weld and El Paso and the University of Colorado at Boulder) trained in suicide awareness and intervention strategies by the state health department's Office of Suicide Prevention.

The Colorado Department of Education hosted regional trainings for local school districts and community partners regarding Homeland Security-related planning and resources. By this time, 100% of Colorado school districts were determined to be in compliance with the Safe School Act's policy requirement regarding written emergency response plans.

Blueprints for Violence Prevention Conference, Denver, March, 2006

- Provided information to practitioners and policy makers about research-based ways to improve school climate and prevent violence based on the Blueprints Model and Promising programs.

An armed, outside invader assaulted students and a teacher at Platte Canyon High School in Bailey, Colorado. The recently constructed school includes design features incorporated by the architect as a result of the Columbine experience. Sheriff Fred Wegener's deputies and members of the Jefferson County SWAT team employed lessons learned from Columbine to respond to the incident. The Colorado Bureau of Investigation led the investigation, and the Colorado State Patrol assisted. September 2006.

2007

At the request of President George Bush, U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services Mike Leavitt and Gov. Bill Ritter convened a discussion group of two dozen Colorado school safety leaders in Denver following the Virginia Tech shootings to study broad mental health issues as they relate to Columbine and other acts of school violence. Colorado experts contribute to the formation of national policy on school safety. Gov. Ritter requested additional steps to be taken by the Colorado Department of Public Safety to advance school safety efforts in Colorado. April 2007. CDPS proposed creation of School Safety Resource Center.

Colorado General Assembly passed bill supporting Safe2Tell Program (SB 07-197)

- Ensured anonymity of persons reporting to the hotline and confidentiality of Safe2Tell records

The Colorado Attorney General's Office hosted SAFE SCHOOLS: The Next Generation Conference in April, 2007.

- Speakers provided information about a variety of topics related to keeping schools safe from violence. Colorado's new School Safety Resource Center has assumed the hosting of similar meetings with support from the Colorado Attorney General's Office.

2008

Blueprints for Violence Prevention Conference, Denver, March, 2008

- Provided information to practitioners and policy makers about research-based ways to improve school climate and prevent violence based on the Blueprints Model and Promising programs.

Governor Ritter identified school safety as a top legislative priority for his 2008 legislative agenda. He subsequently signed the first bill passed during the 2008 legislative session creating Colorado's State School Safety Resource Center - C.R.S. 24-33.5-1801 (SB 08-001)

- A state school safety resource center was established in the Department of Public Safety to assist schools in preventing, preparing for, responding to, and recovering from emergencies and crisis situations and to foster positive learning environments. It includes the identification of pilot sites to receive enhanced school safety services.
- This legislation created the Center's advisory council, composed of representatives from five other state agencies, higher education, and school districts.
- Additional legislation amended the School Safety Resource Center pilot site projects to include funds to support pilot schools to provide school mapping information to first responders in case of an emergency (HB 08-1267).

Legislation passed to amend the Safe Schools Act to require all districts and the Charter School Institute (CSI) to adopt the tenets of the National Response Framework (NRF), including the National Incident Management System (NIMS) and the Incident Command System (ICS) - C.R.S. 22-32-109.1 (SB-08-181)

- All districts and the CSI must establish a date by July 1, 2009 for when they expect to be in compliance with NIMS.

Approximately 13,500 first responders and managers have been trained during the past four years in National Incident Management System classes.

Department of Public Health and Environment sponsored "Bridging the Divide: Suicide Awareness and Prevention" summit at Regis University, May 2008.

2009

Governor Bill Ritter, Jr., is expected to deliver a personal message to participants attending a regional school safety conference in Colorado Springs on April 15, 2009. For more information: www.safeschools.state.co.us

Tenth anniversary of the Columbine shootings, April 20, 2009.

The Colorado Trust, Mental Health America of Colorado, and the Office of Suicide Prevention in the state health department plan to release an updated suicide prevention strategy and report in May 2009.

More than 850 Colorado emergency service agencies, including local, county, state and military agencies, now linked through the state digital trunked radio system. More than 46,500 radios now linked together, vastly improving communications among emergency service agencies.

Office of suicide Prevention plans to hold its second “Bridging the Divide: Suicide Awareness and Prevention” summit at Regis University in May 2009.

Highlights of Past and Continuing Bullying Prevention Efforts

2000-2005

- Spring 2001: The Colorado General Assembly amended the Safe School Act to require school districts to have a policy addressing the education and prevention of bullying.
 - Summer, 2001: The Colorado Association of School Boards issued a model policy to member school districts regarding compliance with the amended Safe School Act.
 - Sept. 2001: The Colorado Department of Education provided a technical assistance packet to all school districts regarding bullying prevention best practices.
- Oct. 24, 2001: The Colorado Anti-Bullying Campaign was launched by the Colorado Trust, Colorado Attorney General Ken Salazar, The Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence at the University of Colorado-Boulder, Coca Cola, Big Horn Center, Channel 9 News, and the Denver Post.
 - Effort included a kick-off event for the campaign, website, hotline, PSAs and other resources to raise awareness and provide assistance for bullying and harassment in schools.
- 2002 – 2003 – The Colorado Department of Education confirmed that 100% of the school districts complied with the bullying prevention amendment to the Safe Schools Act.

- 2003 forward – Numerous statewide safe school trainings, conferences, and websites include bullying prevention-related resources and ongoing research-related information for best practices.

Compiled by:

Colorado



School Safety Resource Center

Colorado Department of Public Safety
700 Kipling Street – Suite 1000
Lakewood, CO 80215
303-239-4391

April 8, 2009