

***PREVENTION: BEST PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ALL
SCHOOLS***

**From the Review of Psychological Safety and Threat Assessment Issues
Related to the Arapahoe High School Shooting**

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Some Best Practices *Prevention Planning* for ALL Schools

1. Establishment of a district safety team (safe schools planning team) to provide leadership and vision to coordinate efforts in all phases of a comprehensive safe schools plan and to provide the leadership and monitoring of the broadly defined psychological safety efforts in a district.
 - a. Safety Team <https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/cssrc/cssrc-tools-and-templates>
2. Multi-tiered planning and accountability for prevention and other psychological safety efforts. This helps identify what is expected as best practice at the universal level, for all schools, students, and staff, and what is expected or provided at the other levels of intervention efforts.
 - a. Comprehensive Safety Planning Elements and Tools
<http://cdpsdocs.state.co.us/safeschools/CSSRC%20Documents/CSSRC%20Comprehensive%20School%20Safety%20Plan%20Elements%202014.pdf>
3. Data based decision-making should be used for identification of needs, capacity building, and progress in psychological safety and prevention over time.
 - a. Resource mapping of current district capacity can contribute to the planning and setting of priorities, given the limitations of every district's resources, time, and personnel. The process can then be repeated at school sites.
<https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/cssrc/cssrc-tools-and-templates>
 - b. Nationwide or statewide data will not provide individual schools an accurate picture of their own students or community. Secondary schools are encouraged to participate in the Healthy Kids Colorado Survey or complete climate surveys that can also provide comparison data.
 - c. Resources for climate surveys "at a glance" can be found at
<https://cdpsdocs.state.co.us/safeschools/CSSRC%20Documents/CSSRC%20Resources%20for%20Climate%20Surveys%20at%20a%20glance.pdf/>
 - d. Measuring School Climate Toolkit from the Colorado Education Initiative
<http://www.coloradoedinitiative.org/resources/measuring-school-climate-toolkit-districts-schools/>
4. Ongoing accountability and monitoring of prevention and psychological safety efforts, based on the district vision and priorities.

5. The Colorado School Safety Resource Center (CSSRC) has identified a variety of resources that can be helpful to school safety planning and school safety teams. A guide is available to identify key elements for districts and schools. The guide also provides resources for development of a comprehensive safe schools plan and there is an accompanying checklist of the elements for use by a team (CSSRC, 2014a; CSSRC, 2014b).

Some Best Practices in Awareness and Reporting for ALL Schools

1. *All members of every school community should be trained* in the indicators of behavioral and emotional concerns, knowledge about multiple reporting systems, and the *importance of timely reporting*.
 - a. Teachers and other school staff need awareness training that includes: identification of the warning signs of troubled kids, identification of threats, awareness of child abuse and reporting requirements, awareness of signs of depressed or suicidal students, identifying drug and alcohol misuse, harassment and bullying, self-injury, and other topics that require reporting. Training should also include the importance of reporting in a timely manner. *This is important at all schools.*
 - b. Parents also need information about recognizing behaviors of concern and the importance of reporting concerns to school staff to obtain possible intervention for their child.
 - c. The student “code of silence” is seen as a strong factor. Adults need to take specific steps to try to address this from an early age. It can be helpful to describe it as “getting help for friends or other people” and that “telling helps keep people safe”. Students should be given information about reporting various types of concerns, including threats, and where to report them, including awareness about Safe 2 Tell, any district reporting mechanisms, the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, and telling a trusted adult at home or at school. The notion that students “are our eyes and ears” stated by the AHS principal is correct (Premanko, 2015).
 - Schools should provide students a review of important policies regarding student code of conduct every year (PBIS model recommends reminders two times a year about key elements of conduct code or behavioral expectations).
 - Safe2Tell has various resources available on its website to assist in training, including discussion questions for high school students (safe2tell.org).
2. Teachers are not required to take school law classes, but privacy of school and special education records is often emphasized in education programs. FERPA was designed to protect student education records and *should not be a barrier to*

discussing or reporting personal observations of behaviors of concern. FERPA misunderstandings are evident enough to require a reminder about FERPA to all new and current administrative and teaching staff in all schools. The misunderstandings are also commonplace enough across the country that the Family Policy Compliance Office at the U.S. Department of Education and the Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools (REMS) websites both include information about balancing privacy and safety, the health and safety exceptions to the law, and the misunderstandings of the law on the sharing of personal information (<http://familypolicy.ed.gov/faq-page/ferpa-school-officials> and <http://rems.ed.gov/K12FERPA.aspx>). Information on this topic is also presented as part of the Guide for Developing High Quality Emergency Operation Plans (<http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/oese/oshs/rems-k-12-guide.pdf>. U.S. Department of Education, et al., 2013).

Some Best Practices in *Delivery of Mental Health Services* for ALL Schools

1. All national professional organizations have provided suggested ratios for staff to students in individual schools. Best available data on national recommendations are School Psychologist: 1:500-700, School Social Workers: 1:250, School Counselors: 1:250, and School Nurses: 1:750. Information reviewed from a couple of years ago shows Colorado schools to be staffed at significantly lower than recommended ratios. *School districts are encouraged to increase staffing for mental health support as resources allow.*
2. School mental health support personnel with their training and knowledge are important to the threat assessment and threat management process in schools. Regular professional growth should also include updates and opportunities for peer consultation, knowledge about the availability of community resources, and case practice in threat assessment, suicide prevention, and on other violence prevention topics.

Some Best Practices *Using School Discipline as Prevention* for ALL Schools

1. PBIS principles include a positive approach to discipline that includes teaching behavioral expectations to students. This principle can still be effectively used in schools that are not using other aspects of the PBIS model. Teaching of appropriate behavior should be explicit and should be started in school at an early age. For students of all ages, this includes regular reminders of the behavioral expectations and a continuum of procedures for discouraging rule violations.
2. Clarity should be provided to teaching staff about what behaviors are expected to be referred to the office and what the typical behaviors are that they are expected to manage, such as tardiness to class, moderate attendance difficulties, typical misbehaviors, communication with parents, etc.

3. Each school should have a method for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of the discipline system. Regular review of discipline data can be helpful in that process.
4. Collaboration between disciplinary personnel and mental health personnel can be an effective tool to best problem-solve about difficult students and difficult concerns.
5. Most importantly, school administrators and disciplinary personnel need regular policy, practice, and legal updates. They also need a skill set to effectively address behavioral issues, including awareness of mental health issues. They need to clearly understand the restrictions and exceptions to FERPA, what information can be shared on a “need to know” basis, and the district’s policy and practices on “reasonable suspicion” searches and best practice suggestions in the search of social media.

In Summary: Prevention Recommendations for ALL Schools

Providing good prevention efforts is multi-faceted, and districts and schools are encouraged to think of early, integrated, and coordinated efforts to provide the most benefit to all students. The following prevention recommendations in this report are designed to help *all* districts improve their psychological safety and prevention efforts.

1. A district level school safety team (safe schools planning team) is recommended to all districts. An effective team is a representative group from leadership, various safety, prevention, behavioral and special education services, and includes various grade levels to discuss and proactively address the district’s needs and services, in all physical and psychological safety areas, Prevention – Recovery.
 - a. The purposes of this team would be to assess strengths and gaps in existing services and supports, to set priorities from best practice recommendations, to oversee progress with the district priorities, determine school site expectations and help to determine compliance with best practices in school safety.
 - b. Schools are also encouraged to have a school safety team at the school site level. That team should also meet regularly and plan and review efforts at the school site level. Site based data will then drive variance in site based decisions related to the outline of best practices from the district.
2. Psychological safety and prevention is best driven by data. Districts and schools are encouraged to review a variety of existing data regularly to assist in setting priorities and to provide monitoring of their efforts over time.
 - a. Secondary schools are also encouraged to consider the addition of climate or other surveys to gather the view of student attitudes, behaviors, and

perceptions. A climate survey is best seen as gathering teacher data and parent data also, as possible.

- b. All districts and school will have practical considerations such as funding sources and staff resources regarding implementation of this recommendation. Other considerations include deciding what to measure, whom to survey, the method for surveying, the time required, etc. The resource from the Colorado Education Initiative (2012) can be reviewed for additional items of consideration about surveys and available resources. <http://www.coloradoedinitiative.org/resources/measuring-school-climate-toolkit-districts-schools/>
3. Increased awareness of indicators of behavioral and emotional concerns, knowledge about multiple reporting systems, and the importance of timely reporting should take place *throughout every school and community*. Awareness about district systems for reporting and Safe2Tell should be provided to students and staff in all schools and school districts across Colorado. Information should also be provided to parents and community partners. In the review of the AHS incident, there was information about concerns across the school, the students, the parents, law enforcement and in the community that was not reported or gathered to allow for needed intervention to occur before the tragedy.
 - a. Any effort to support a statewide promotion of the anonymous Safe2Tell system is seen as helpful. The reporting system has been in existence since 2004, yet students, staff and parents may not be aware of it. This is an important addition to safety and prevention efforts.
4. FERPA misunderstandings are evident enough to require a reminder about FERPA to new and current administrative and teaching staff in all schools. The misunderstandings are also commonplace enough across the country that the Family Policy Compliance Office at the U.S. Department of Education and the Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools (REMS) websites both include information about balancing privacy and safety, the health and safety exceptions to the law, and the misunderstandings of the law on the sharing of personal information (<http://familypolicy.ed.gov/faq-page/ferpa-school-officials> and <http://rems.ed.gov/K12FERPA.aspx>).
5. Many professionals in a school help to support students' positive mental health. The mental health personnel mentioned above, school nurses, and other instructional support personnel all work to provide support to students. School-based mental health can serve to support a positive school climate, as well as to provide direct intervention to students. Colorado schools seemed to be staffed at significantly lower levels than national recommendations for school mental health support staff. Given limitations to available resources, it remains a challenge for some districts to meet the recommended standards. Increasing the availability of

mental health resources would likely be beneficial both to individual students and to general school safety.

- a. The teaming work of mental health support staff with administrative and disciplinary staff is important, as it provides integrated efforts from professionals with differing expertise. This teaming approach can also be linked with academic support and community partners. Parents also play an important part in mental health support. School efforts should be aimed at partnering with parents in a variety of ways, in the best interest of kids and safety.
 - b. Regular professional development related to crisis prevention, effective intervention, using community partnerships, effective strategies for working with parents, developing a positive school climate, etc. are especially important for these employee groups who provide services to students.
6. School administrative and disciplinary personnel need time for continuing education. Some important topics needing regular updates include: best practices in effective discipline, FERPA clarifications, information about identification of indicators of mental health concerns, and “reasonable suspicion” searches.
- a. Schools should use their own disciplinary data to review consistency and effectiveness of their practices. A review of data may also determine consistency with CDE guidelines and drive topics for continuing education.
 - b. Completion of school threat assessments should be noted in electronic record keeping for individual students. This would help to maintain the knowledge of that data source over time.

Using *Protection and Security* as Prevention: Recommendations for ALL Schools

1. All campus security or campus supervision staff should have regular training in awareness of behaviors of concern and strategies and skills for best practice in non-violent crisis intervention to help diffuse situations and students and to resolve crises before they become violent.

For Best Practice Threat Assessment Recommendations: See Appendix C from the report

<http://www.littletonpublicschools.net/sites/default/files/Kanan%20et%20al.%20AHS%20Report%202016.pdf>.