



MISSISSIPPI  
DEPARTMENT  
OF EDUCATION

MISSISSIPPI  
SCHOOL SAFETY  
MANUAL

OFFICE OF SAFE & ORDERLY SCHOOLS

DIVISION OF SCHOOL SAFETY

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## Introduction

Comprehensive school safety is fundamental to student success and achievement. This resource guide was designed to provide the reader with resources that enable school districts to establish and maintain safe and orderly schools through the development of comprehensive school safety plans.

The intent of this resource guide is to serve as an easy referral document for the administrator, School Resource Officer (SRO), and School Safety Officer (SSO) when confronted with routine challenges of daily operations. Additionally, it is anticipated the reader will better understand how to develop school safety plans and procedures appropriate for their individual school and community environments.

This resource guide provides both generally accepted standards of school safety, as well as state statute, State Board of Education (SBE) policies, and process (accreditation) standards, outlined in the current edition of the *Mississippi Public School Accountability Standards*. Safe schools are a whole community responsibility including administrators, teachers, support staff, students, and parents. The information contained in this document is meant to be a guide for emergency planning and is not all-inclusive.

The *Mississippi Department of Education Quick Reference to School Related Statutes* is a separate document that includes many of the criminal, educational and juvenile statutes in the *Mississippi Code of 1972, Annotated*. The Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) does not issue legal opinions. ***Any official legal opinion regarding any state statute must come from the Office of the Mississippi Attorney General.***

# **The School Safety Concept**

## **Background**

School safety planning remains an ever-present priority for providing a safe and orderly school environment. It first became an issue in Mississippi with the recognition that schools may be safer with the utilization of security and emergency management methodology.

Mississippi Code Ann. § 37-3-81 required the MDE to establish and maintain a School Safety Center within the Office of Safe and Orderly Schools, which is referred to as the Division of School Safety. The Division of School Safety was established within the Office of Safe and Orderly Schools to provide technical assistance, consulting services, and training. The primary purpose of the Division of School Safety is to serve as the primary school safety center for all PK-12 public school districts, nonpublic schools accredited by the MDE, local law enforcement agencies, emergency responders, and community members throughout the state of Mississippi.

MDE has developed a model wherein school safety requires a broad-based commitment from the entire community. This commitment must promote a comprehensive approach to school safety that focuses on prevention, mitigation, response, and recovery. The security and safety process must complement the instructional process and support an environment free of fear, harassment, and danger. Each method of approach is equally important and necessary as the other.

## **Operational Approach**

Mississippi has selected a combination of the programmatic and operational approaches to school safety. If a school is unable to maintain order of the learning environment and the student population by sound daily operating procedures there will be such a level of disruption, or lack of confidence by participants, the instructional process will be hampered at all levels. Students, parents, and staff must feel safe to obtain the maximum level of student achievement.

MDE is focusing on the development of the comprehensive school safety plan as the primary foundation instrument by which schools can conduct a needs assessment as well as design and implement changes to policies, procedures, and emergency protocols based on evaluation results. MDE has established broad principles of student intervention, discipline, and management. Implementing these principles daily, as part of normal routine, will ensure schools are maintaining a safe and orderly school environment. Operational approaches address routine procedures and typically yield an almost immediate safe school environment when rigorously implemented. A safe school environment requires the support from all levels, starting with the local school

board and superintendent, principals, teachers, and students to implement the school safety plan, as well as disciplinary policies and procedures. Examples, include but are not limited to, student monitoring, implementation of student codes of conduct, properly utilized disciplinary procedures, deployment of School Resource Officers (SRO) and School Safety Officers (SSO), proper enforcement procedures, and compliance with state statutes, SBE policies, and process (accreditation) standards. The local school district is also a liaison between the local law enforcement agencies, emergency management services, youth court, and community service agencies.

## **Programmatic Approach**

Programmatic approaches include character education, crime prevention programs, aggression management, peer counseling, Drug Abuse Resistance Education (D.A.R.E.), Gang Resistance Education and Training (G.R.E.A.T), and Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps (JROTC) and similar programs. Schools shall only implement those programs that are researched-based and demonstrate proven success in statistically reducing student violence, narcotics and/or alcohol usage. These programs shall be periodically evaluated for effectiveness and efficiency with an expectation of discontinuing those programs that are ineffective or not cost effective.

## **Process/Accreditation Standards and the School Safety Plan**

The Comprehensive School Safety Plan is essentially the foundation the school uses to maintain a safe and secure educational environment. The existence of a comprehensive school safety plan is a generally accepted standard of school safety, as well as a mandatory requirement of Miss. Code Ann. § 37-3-83, and the current edition of the *Mississippi Public School Accountability Standards* (Process Standard 31). Specific process (accreditation) standards for school safety include:

1. The school must have a crisis response plan that includes specific staff response protocols for: (Crisis Plan Review)
  - a. Fire
  - b. Bomb Threat/Explosion
  - c. Tornado/Hurricane/Inclement Weather
  - d. Armed/Unarmed Intruder
  - e. Earthquake
  - f. Interior/Exterior Hazardous Materials
  - g. Threats unique to the geographical location of the school, such as nuclear incidents, hazardous materials, spills, train derailment, etc.
  - h. Epidemic/Pandemic Response

2. Staff member roles and responsibilities must be identified, and all staff must be familiar with the crisis response plan. (Staff interviews)
3. Staff Crisis (Emergency) Response Team identified, including contact information.
4. Drills must be documented in accordance with the following schedule: (Drill File)
  - a. Fire Drills – Monthly (Miss. Code. Ann. § 37-11-5)
  - b. Tornado Drills – Minimum of two (2) per year.
  - c. Active Shooter Drills – Minimum of two (2) per year within the first 60 days of each semester (Miss. Code. Ann. § 37-11-5) The following three (3) examples and definitions are acceptable for Active Shooter Drills:
    - i. Lockdown/Intruder Shelter-In-Place Drill: An exercise to practice procedures that respond to an emergency situation including, but not limited to, a lockdown, or active shooter situation and that is similar in duration to a fire drill. All classes must shelter in place. Administrative personnel and SRO(s) walk the halls to ensure all classroom doors and the building is secure.
    - ii. Tabletop Activity: This activity involves key personnel discussing simulated scenarios in an informal setting. Tabletops can be used to assess plans, policies, and procedures.
    - iii. Full Scale Operational Based Response Exercise: This is a multi-agency, multi-jurisdictional activity involving actual deployment of resources in a coordinated response as if a real incident has occurred. This exercise tests many components of one (1) or more capabilities within emergency response and recovery, and is typically used to assess plans, procedures and coordinated response under crisis conditions.
5. The school must have two (2) family reunification points designated to include maps to these locations. (Crisis Plan Review)
6. The school must have two (2) evacuation locations designated to include maps to these locations.
7. The school must be compliant with all pertinent state statutes and SBE Policies, including but not limited to: (District Policy and Procedure Manual Review)
  - a. Dissemination of the Student Code of Conduct (Miss. Code Ann. § 37-11-53)
  - b. Possess and enforce the Student Disciplinary Plan
  - c. Report all crimes in accordance with the provisions of Miss. Code Ann. § 37-11-29
  - d. Restraint and Seclusion policy (Miss. Admin. Code 7-3: 38.13, State Board Policy Chapter 38, Rule 38.1)
  - e. Search policy for students, personal property, and vehicles that is strictly enforced
  - f. Enforce visitor control procedures

g. School Safety Personnel:

1. SRO's and SSO's must be certified by MDE within (two) 2 years of appointment to the school if employed by the school district.
2. All school safety personnel must be supervised by the superintendent or designee, excluding principals.
3. SRO's must be certified full-time police officers.
4. SRO's must be armed and deployed in accordance with the generally accepted standards of police practice. They must qualify with firearms bi-annually.
5. SRO's must attend Advanced Law Enforcement Rapid Response Training (ALERRT) every third year.
6. All school safety personnel must receive a minimum of 40 hours of MDE sanctioned in-service training per year.

## Assessment

Evaluating school safety procedures and practices is an ongoing process. One of the first steps in designing a Comprehensive School Safety Plan is the evaluation of the school's current safety status and statistics. When drafting a comprehensive school safety plan, a school safety committee shall be formed with representatives of all elements of the school and community responders. The plan shall be reviewed and approved by each entity involved. The school safety plan shall be reviewed/revised annually (at the end of each school year) and submitted annually to the local school board for approval.

The purpose of the assessment is to increase district knowledge of gaps or areas of needed improvement, evaluate the procedures for legality and consistency, and to establish new policies based on assessment findings. It is recommended that a comprehensive school safety assessment be conducted by either MDE's Division of School Safety, a certified SRO, or a School Safety Administrator that uses MDE standards for assessment.

It is also recommended the assessment instruments be used to assess perceptions of school safety on the part of staff, faculty, and students. It should be remembered that perceptions do not necessarily reflect facts regarding school safety. The Division of School Safety will assist local school districts in these areas upon request.

## Types of Assessments

1. **Site Assessment:** A site assessment examines the safety, accessibility, and emergency preparedness of the school's buildings and grounds. This assessment includes, but is not limited to, a review of building access and egress control measures, visibility around the exterior of the building, compliance with applicable

architectural standards for individuals with disabilities and others with functional and access needs, and emergency vehicle access.

A certified threat assessment officer shall conduct an annual inspection and threat assessment of each public school in the state. The threat assessment officer shall develop an improvement plan for each school inspected. The assessment shall include the inspection of surveillance equipment and building-specific floor plans. The findings of the inspection and threat assessment, including a copy of the improvement plan shall be provided to local law enforcement agencies and the local school board within four (4) weeks of completion. [Miss. Code Ann. § 37-3-93(3)]

**Purpose and Results:**

- a. Increase understanding of the potential impact of threats and hazards on the school buildings and grounds;
  - b. Increase understanding of risk and vulnerabilities of the school buildings and grounds when developing the plan; and,
  - c. Increase knowledge of which facilities are physically accessible to students with disabilities, staff, parents, volunteer workers, and emergency response personnel.
2. **Culture and Climate Assessment:** In schools with positive climates, students are more likely to feel connected to adults and their peers. This fosters a nurturing environment where students are more likely to succeed, feel safe, and report threats. A school culture and climate assessment evaluate student and staff connectedness to the school and help identify problem behaviors. For example, this assessment may reveal a high number of bullying incidents, indicating the need to implement an anti-bullying program.

**Purpose and Results:**

- a. Increase knowledge of students, and staff perceptions as to their safety; and,
  - b. Increase knowledge of concerning behaviors that should be addressed to improve school climate.
3. **School Threat Assessment:** A school threat assessment analyzes communication and behaviors to determine whether a student, staff, or other person may pose a threat. These assessments must be based on fact, must comply with applicable privacy, civil, and other laws. The threat assessment team is separate from the planning team and meets on its own regular schedule.

### **Purpose and Results:**

Students, staff, or other persons that may pose a threat are identified before a threat develops into an incident and are referred for services, if appropriate.

4. **Capacity Assessment:** The planning team should understand what resources are at their disposal. A capacity assessment examines the capabilities of the students and staff as well as the services and material resources of community partners. This assessment is used to identify people in the building with certain skills (e.g., first aid, search and rescue training, counseling and mental health expertise, etc.). Equipment and supplies shall be inventoried. The inventory shall include an evaluation of equipment and supplies used for people with disabilities, such as sign language interpreters, evacuation chairs, accessible transportation, and consumable and durable medical supplies.

### **Purpose and Results:**

- a. Increase understanding of available resources; and,
- b. Increase knowledge of staff capabilities will help planners assign roles and responsibilities in the plan.

## **Comprehensive School Safety Plan Components**

There are three (3) components to a Comprehensive School Safety Plan.

### **1. District and School Policies and Procedures Manual**

Policies and procedures that are clearly communicated and consistently enforced to afford a safe school operating environment. A listing of policies, procedures, and regulations the district and/or school has enacted are typically those items listed in:

- a. Employee Handbook: Monitoring duties, intruder policies, evacuation procedures, etc.
- b. Parent and/or Student Handbooks: Uniform policies, code of conduct policies, etc.
- c. Discipline Code: Hearing procedures, prohibited conduct, etc.
- d. District Policies and Procedures: school safety policies, campus security policy, needs and threat assessment policies, alternative school/detention policies, etc.
- e. Maintenance Policies: extra-curricular activity policies, transportation policies, etc.

- f. Programs and staff training the school uses to reduce violence or non-compliant behavior such as D.A.R.E., G.R.E.A.T., JROTC, Youth Crime Watch, Teen Court, etc.

## **2. Programs that Promote Compliant Behavior and Reduce Prohibited Conduct**

A listing of those programs that have been implemented to encourage a safe and secure school environment and compliant behavior. The program shall:

- a. Be statistically proven to promote good character and encourage compliant behavior; and,
- b. Include a means of objectively measuring the success of the program.

## **3. Crisis Response Plan**

In accordance with Miss. Code Ann. § 37-3-101 the comprehensive school safety plan must include a comprehensive listing of Crisis Response Protocols to include all staff actions and a protocol for the following events at a minimum:

- a. Fire
- b. Bomb Threat/Explosion
- c. Tornado/Hurricane/Inclement Weather
- d. Armed/Unarmed Intruder
- e. Earthquake
- f. Interior/Exterior Hazardous Materials
- g. Threats unique to the geographical location of the school, such as nuclear incidents, hazardous materials, spills, train derailment, etc.
- h. Epidemic/Pandemic Response

Each classroom shall contain emergency packs that include color cards for outside evacuations only (Red – have an emergency issue, Yellow – need assistance from an Administrator, Green – no issues), class roster with emergency student contacts, emergency procedures checklist, whistle, and list of any specific special needs (medications, dietary needs, or other medical issues pertaining to students).

## **School Safety Personnel**

Assignment of personnel shall be based on the school safety assessment, threat profile, needs of the district, and funding availability. In accordance with Miss. Code Ann. § 37-3-321, all security or law enforcement personnel assigned to a school district on a full-time basis (greater than 75%) must be certified by MDE within two (2) years of appointment if employed directly by a school district. The School Resource Officer (or SSO/CEO) shall be an integral part of all safety planning areas since this individual is responsible for safety planning and response.

Prerequisites for School Resource Officer (SRO) classes:

- Independent Study: IS – 100
- Independent Study: IS – 200
- Independent Study: IS – 700
- Independent Study: IS – 800
- Advanced Law Enforcement Rapid Response Training (ALERRT) Level 1

## **School Resource Officer (SRO):**

1. **Definition:** An officer, commissioned by a local law enforcement agency or school district, who has at least three (3) years of full time commissioned law enforcement service and is a graduate of the Basic Law Enforcement Officer Training Program and the MDE School Resource Officer Basic Course or the National Association of School Resource Officers (NASRO) Basic School Resource Officer Training plus eight (8) hours of MDE state specific content training. This officer shall be supervised by the superintendent or their designee, excluding principals. The officer typically spends 40 percent of their time in enforcement and security administration, 30 percent of their time teaching character related education subjects, and 30 percent of their time mentoring at-risk students.
2. **Duties/Qualifications:** The officer must be at least 24 years of age and have at least three (3) years of law enforcement experience prior to assignment. The SRO is assigned to a school district on a full-time basis. Duties include school safety planning, enforcement, teaching, and mentoring. It is recommended that the SRO have an assigned office space, computer, and phone line. This allows the SRO to have a location to write reports, maintain intelligence logs, communicate with surrounding Law Enforcement Agencies for situational awareness, and research items that may provide safety and security to schools. The SRO is expected to be armed and maintain qualifications with the issued weapon every six (6) months. Officers shall be screened for intelligence, ability to teach subjects within their area of expertise, and their ability to interact with students. The SRO is not merely an armed security guard.
3. **Minimum Training Standards:**
  - a. Completion of the Police Officer Basic Course (Reserve Basic is not acceptable);
  - b. Completion of the MDE School Resource Officer Basic Course within two (2) years of appointment or the National Association of School Resource Officers (NASRO) Basic School Resource Officer Training plus eight (8) hours of MDE state specific content training (See MS Code 37-7-321); and,
  - c. Forty (40) hours of MDE sanctioned in-service training per year.

## **Campus Enforcement Officer (CEO):**

1. **Definition:** An officer, commissioned by a local law enforcement agency or local school district in accordance with Miss. Code Ann. § 37-3-321 who is a graduate of the Reserve Police Officer Basic Course and is assigned enforcement, security, and safety duties.
2. **Duties/Qualifications:** The Campus Enforcement Officer (CEO) is a School Safety Officer that is commissioned by a local law enforcement agency that has law enforcement authority. The CEO has authority to carry a weapon and make arrests. The officer is responsible only for enforcement and safety related activities. The Campus Enforcement Officer is not trained in school safety, planning, classroom teaching, or counseling related duties.
3. **Minimum Training Standards:**
  - a. Completion of the Reserve Police Officer Basic Course; and,
  - b. Forty (40) hours of MDE sanctioned in-service training per year is recommended.

## **School Safety Officer (SSO):**

1. **Definition:** A security and safety specialist, employed by the school district or private security company, who has been contracted by the district to provide routine safety and security duties.
2. **Duties/Qualifications:** The School Safety Officer (SSO) is assigned routine duties of safety and physical security under the supervision of a School Resource Officer, Campus Enforcement Officer, or school administrator. The SSO does not have authority to carry a weapon or make arrests. The SSO conducts routine patrols, secures buildings, and checks for safety hazards.
3. **Minimum Training Standards:**
  - a. Completion of the MDE School Safety Officer Basic Course; and,
  - b. Forty (40) hours of MDE sanctioned in-service training per year.

# **Safety Policy/Guidelines for Consideration**

## **Operational Policies:**

The following list is not exhaustive but provides a starting point for the topics/policies that shall be considered. All school safety related plans and programs shall be based on a comprehensive assessment and state statutes relating to school safety.

1. Discipline Plan
2. Code of Conduct Policies
3. Playground Policies
4. Duty Roster
5. Traffic Policies
6. Visitor Policies and Procedures
7. Search Policies and Procedures
8. Dress Code
9. Electronic Communication/Cell Phone Policies
10. Internet Policies
11. Field Trip/Special Event Policies
12. Plain Language Commands (NIMS Compliance)
13. Parking and Automobile Policies
14. Evacuation Procedures
15. Medication Dispensing Policy
16. Shop Safety Policy
17. Juvenile Court Liaison Policy
18. Alarm Systems
19. Posting of Signs
20. Hazardous Material Policies
21. Inclement Weather Policies and Procedures
22. Epidemic/Pandemic Response Policies and Procedures

## **Program Implementation:**

Examples include, but are not limited to the following:

1. Drug Abuse Resistance Education (D.A.R.E.) - to be taught by an SRO or other Law Enforcement
2. Gang Resistance Education and Training (G.R.E.A.T)
3. Teen School Emergency Response Training (S.E.R.T.)
4. Campus Safety Council
5. Teen Court
6. Youth Crime Watch

7. Boys and Girls Clubs
8. Civil Air Patrol Aerospace Leadership Course
9. Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps (JROTC)
10. 4-H Programs

### **Safety Concerns:**

Safety concerns include, but are not limited to the following:

1. School location and age: The neighborhood, age of the school, maintenance level, attendance, etc.
2. Communication Systems: Shall have two-way communication between office and key personnel (Administrators, Janitorial Staff, School Safety Personnel, etc.) as well as an emergency phone system.
3. Surveillance Systems, if needed: The surveillance system shall be monitored and/or recorded. Local district policies shall specify if the system is being used as a deterrent or monitoring tool.
4. Shut-off valves to utilities shall be located and noted on the school map.
5. Fire drills shall be conducted and documented monthly. (Miss. Code. Ann. § 37-11-5)
6. Tornado drills shall be conducted and documented a minimum of two (2) times per year.
7. Active Shooter Drills shall be conducted and documented a minimum of two (2) per year within the first 60 days of each semester (Miss. Code. Ann. § 37-11-5). (See acceptable examples and definitions for Active Shooter Drills on page 4.)
8. Building Accessibility: Perimeter doors allowing ingress and egress from public areas shall be one-way or monitored.
9. Classrooms shall have interior door locks (or method to secure the door for a lockdown), a copy of the room level crisis plan, and classroom emergency packs.
10. Parent and bus traffic shall be segregated and controlled.
11. Emergency lighting shall be operable.
12. Custodial closets, electrical, plumbing, and gas equipment areas shall be locked. Storage areas shall be neat and free of flammable or hazardous materials.
13. Science labs shall have safety equipment and emergency protocols. Chemicals shall be segregated and tagged with expiration dates.

# **Policy Planning: Roles and Responsibilities**

## **Expand the Partnership**

Policies and programs require community based collaborative efforts to be effective, and shall include students, parents, teachers, administrators, staff, social and mental health professionals, local law enforcement agencies, emergency response personnel, local school board member(s), and representatives from the local business community. The local school district shall have a multi-disciplinary team in place to assess the credibility and response to resolving threat issues.

## **The Local School Board**

The local school board is responsible for adopting and implementing policies and procedures that will create and maintain a safe environment for the learning process as well as reflect consistency with all relevant statutes.

## **Administrators**

Administrators have the inherent authority and responsibility to conduct administrative investigations regarding possible violation of state statutes, and State Board of Education policies and procedures. Administrators need only a reasonable suspicion of a violation to question and search a student. The administrators have the authority to file criminal charges, pursuant to applicable state statutes, on behalf of the school district for crimes committed on school property.

## **Teachers**

Teachers must be directly involved, trained, and supported in all stages of developing programs for safer schools. Teachers are the first line of defense in school safety as a result of their direct contact with students. Teacher insight into potential concerning behavior of students and the school is important in the planning process.

## **Students**

Students can be a crucial component to violence prevention. Students provide an essential perspective on how to promote school safety and shall be included in all efforts to create and maintain a safe and orderly school environment. Non-compliant behavior is a choice on the student's part and shall be addressed appropriately.

## **Parents**

Parents play a significant role in the school safety process. Parents are responsible for their child's behavior at all times.

## **Local Law Enforcement Agencies**

Law Enforcement Officers (LEO), including SROs, County/City Police Officers, State, and Federal partners can provide vital information in the planning process for safer schools. LEOs understand trends within the communities they serve and have the capability to obtain resources not typically available to those outside the law enforcement area.

## **Emergency Management Services**

Emergency management services consists of Fire Services, Emergency Management, Local Law Enforcement Agencies, Emergency Medical Services, and other emergency response entities. Emergency management services shall be included in the safety planning process, exercises and evaluations.

## **The District Attorney/Youth Court Prosecutor**

The District Attorney/Youth Court Prosecutor may help educate school personnel on legal and criminal issues regarding school safety.

## **Other**

Using a community-based approach to policy planning may include many other entities than the ones listed above. Other possibilities to consider include, but are not limited to the following:

1. Community business partners (Walmart, Lowe's, Home Depot, etc.)
2. Volunteer Services (American Red Cross, Salvation Army, local service groups, etc.)
3. Local hospital(s)
4. Area Specific Threat Entities (Railroad Authority, Airport Authority, local transportation entities, etc.)