

IOWA SCHOOL SAFETY AND INFRASTRUCTURE TASK FORCE REPORT 2024



INTRODUCTION:

Every family should be able to confidently send their children to school knowing they will be safe. Every school employee should be able to confidently answer their vocational calling to educate young minds knowing they too will enjoy and foster a safe environment. As Iowans, we must be persistent in our efforts to keep students and those who care for them safe from violence in our schools. Iowa schools provide a reassuring presence and a much-needed connection for our families, our communities, and our students to learn and grow.

Last July, legislation was enacted (House File 2586 and as amended House File 2652) to address and study school security. In part, the legislation charged the Department of Public Safety, in collaboration with the Department of Education and the Department of Homeland Security and Emergency Management, to convene a task force to study and make recommendations related to the safety and security standards of schools and school infrastructure, including safety and security standards related to doors, windows, cameras, and locks.

As with most modern problems, there is no simple, one-size-fits-all solution to school safety. The Task Force discussed many facets of school safety, to include: the hardening of school buildings, general prevention, critical incident impact mitigation, and overall collaboration between stakeholders. Many discussions noted physical security is merely one component of a safe school environment and that fostering positive mental health within our schools is imperative. The Task Force found it important to note all stakeholders—school staff, parents, community members, mental health providers, juvenile court services, and law enforcement—should have access to critical tools and be empowered to help students feel supported in sharing their struggles and observations. Based on conversations with school constituents, the Task Force found access to mental health services and the ability to report concerning behaviors to be paramount in promoting school safety, despite those topics being outside the defined infrastructure-centered scope of the Task Force.

Since July 1, 2024, the Task Force has met 14 times to learn, research, and discuss a holistic approach to school safety infrastructure. Two consistent themes arose:

- 1. Despite there being no “one-size-fits-all” approach, guidance is needed in helping schools prioritize safety efforts, and***
- 2. Schools are already uniformly committed to improving their security infrastructure with the resources they have.***

As to the first, the geographic and socioeconomic diversity in schools and the significant range in certified enrollments (ranging from three to 30,801 students across public school districts and non-public schools) provide a unique struggle when attempting to ensure students in a small, rural district are just as safe as students in a large suburban one. Part of this struggle is that every school faces unique challenges.

The Task Force was cognizant that local-decision making is often the best-decision making. As such, word choice was intentional, particularly when using “should” as a means of identifying a best practice that may or may not be feasible as opposed to “shall” as a means of indicating a mandatory requirement. Given the nature of the Task Force’s charge, nearly all of its

recommendations will have some fiscal impact on the diverse and unique schools that dot the Iowa landscape, and the Task Force encourages the legislature to carefully consider that impact. The recommendations of this Task Force rely on all stakeholders working together to identify the resources needed to effectively implement physical improvements and strategies designed to promote school safety.

The second consistent theme was Iowa schools care about the children in their charge. As the Task Force completed its work, it was apparent that school safety is a concern of all Iowa schools and school personnel are attempting to make every effort to keep students and staff safe. The recommendations in this report are not a critique of current efforts, but rather are designed to provide guidance to schools and the legislature on how schools may want to focus their resources.

This report is presented on behalf of the School Safety and Infrastructure Task Force, whose members are detailed below. The Task Force expresses its gratitude to the many subject matter experts who participated in the various meetings. The Iowa Department of Public Safety sincerely thanks the members of the Task Force who volunteered countless hours to craft these thoughtful recommendations with the singular goal of keeping Iowans safe.

ERIC ST. CLAIR

Legislative and Policy Liaison
Iowa Department of Education

DR. KASSANDRA CLINE

Bureau Chief
Bureau of School Business Operations
Iowa Department of Education

STEPHANIE EDLER

Administrative Consultant - School Finance
Bureau of School Business Operations
Iowa Department of Education

DAVID RUFFCORN

Building Code Commissioner
Iowa Department of Inspections
Appeals, and Licensing

MATT SHROYER

Critical Infrastructure Protection Coordinator
Iowa Department of Homeland Security and
Emergency Management

DELANE GALVIN

Southeast Warren Community School District
Superintendent

DR. LINDSAY LAURICH

Siouxland Christian School
Superintendent

TOM MESSINGER

Newton Community School District
Superintendent

JEAN SAVERAID

Ballard Community School District
Board Member

MARY POULTER

Colfax-Mingo Community School District
Board Member

DEAN MCCORMICK

Story Construction (retired)

LUCAS HAUSER

School Resource Officer
Carlisle Police Department

JIM STOVER

Training Specialist
Governor's School Safety Bureau
Iowa Department of Public Safety

MATT ANDERSON

Bureau Chief
Governor's School Safety Bureau
Iowa Department of Public Safety

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Consistent with the stated purpose of the legislation, Task Force members took a holistic and thorough approach to safety and security standards of schools and school infrastructure.

Per House File 2652, the Task Force's findings and recommendations must include a proposal for modifications to the state building code applicable to the construction of new attendance centers and the renovation of existing attendance centers and standards designed to increase the safety of schools and school infrastructure.

The following recommendations are intended to keep all students safe regardless of the type of school. For purposes of this report, the Task Force adopted the following definitions:

- ***“School” means a school district, accredited nonpublic school, or a charter school established under Iowa Code chapter 256E or 256F.***
- ***“School facilities” means all buildings under the control of a school district, accredited nonpublic school, or charter school established under Iowa Code chapter 256E or 256F.***
- ***“Attendance center” means a school building containing classrooms used for instructional purposes for elementary, middle, or secondary school students and under the control of a school district, accredited nonpublic school, or charter school established under Iowa Code chapter 256E or 256F.***

In echoing its intentional selection of word choice discussed above, the Task Force would likewise recommend the legislature consider a potential discretionary-best-practice standard by using the word “should” where appropriate and reserve the word “shall” for those instances in which it seeks to enact a mandatory provision. The Task Force does not interpret its charge as mandating the legislature take (or decline to take) any action, but rather, it merely sets forth its recommendations for legislative consideration. The report first provides recommendations regarding all existing schools. The report then details recommendations for only new construction and planned structural renovations. While some identified actions can begin immediately, many of the proposed actions detailed in the report will require dedicated resources, legislative changes, or a combination of both, to carry out the recommendations.

ALL SCHOOL REQUIREMENTS:

1

It is recommended the legislature consider enacting legislation mandating that schools shall be required to sign up for Safe+Sound and that schools shall prominently place links to Safe+Sound on the home page of their website.

Safe+Sound Iowa is a free anonymous school threat reporting platform available to all public and accredited non-public schools across the state and is provided by the Iowa Department of Public Safety through the Governor's School Safety Bureau (GSSB). Students, school staff, parents, and community members can submit school safety concerns anonymously using the Safe+Sound Iowa mobile app, website, or toll-free tip line, all hours of the day or night.

¹The Task Force discussed the propriety of setting dollar-amount thresholds for the definition of “planned structural renovation,” and determined exact dollar thresholds were inappropriate. Several other options were discussed, such as using the thresholds for general obligation bonds, the Department of Administrative Services major maintenance definition, or the Americans with Disabilities Act “20% rule.” The Task Force did not make a determination on what definition is most equitable.

Our evolving digital world knows no geographical boundaries and communication across schools, school districts, and even state lines is common. As a result, students, family members, staff, and community members may receive information about a threat not directed at their individual school, the origination of which is unknown, or identifies a school not currently using the Safe+Sound platform. By requiring all schools sign up for Safe+Sound, this recommendation will ensure GSSB has current, accurate, and effective contact information for schools and public safety officials regardless of where the threat originates. This recommendation does not require schools to use Safe+Sound as their reporting platform. Rather, it is designed to ensure all schools provide necessary contact information so concerns can be timely relayed to that school in the event a threat is received through Safe+Sound. Schools would remain free to use any privately obtained threat-reporting platform of their choosing.

Prominently placing links to Safe+Sound on schools' websites gives all community members easy access to the platform and the knowledge of where to provide critical information. Early detection of a potential threat or student in need is a critical component of student and school safety. The use of the Safe+Sound platform ensures timely intervention and a means to initiate preventative measures before a situation escalates into violence.

2

It is recommended the legislature consider enacting legislation mandating that schools shall develop and implement an access control plan to establish limited, monitored entry points with appropriate security measures to allow access only to those authorized to be within school facilities.

Access control plans allow schools to monitor and restrict who can enter the buildings, prevent unauthorized access, and mitigate potential threats to students, staff, and property. By implementing robust access control plans, schools can improve safety and security for students, staff, parents, and the community.

3

It is recommended the legislature consider enacting legislation mandating that all attendance centers shall have a visitor entry plan, including a process to identify and vet visitors. By default, all exterior doors should remain locked unless otherwise designated in the access control plan.

Similar to access control plans, visitor entry plans enable effective visitor registration and tracking and ensure all guests are accounted for and monitored while on campus. Additionally, locking all exterior doors by default ensures the access control and visitor entry plans are utilized and effective.

The Task Force additionally discussed that access control and visitor entry plans are only meaningful if all parties are willing to abide by them. All schools are highly encouraged to use some type of signage, such as a "Stop the Prop" campaign. "Stop the Prop" encourages people to not prop open doors and to close any doors that are. The campaign is based on research evidencing the frequency in which intruders have gained access to school buildings by propped open or unlocked doors.

4

It is recommended the legislature consider amending Iowa Code § 280.30 to mandate the Department of Education take a holistic review of the requirements of emergency operations plans (EOP), including but not limited to rule making authority and guidance, and that the legislature consider amending Iowa Code § 280.30 to limit the use of table-top exercises as a means of fulfilling the annual drill requirements of Iowa Code § 280.30. It is recommended the Department of Education consider the following during its review:

- a. A confidential privacy warning at the beginning of the document.*
- b. Incorporate the use of building maps, site plans and/or critical incident maps within the EOP.*
- c. Plans for training stakeholder groups (e.g., teachers, staff responsible for students not in a designated classroom space (e.g., lunchroom, playground)), bus drivers (responsible for arrivals/evacuations), floating staff (e.g., substitutes), facilities staff (e.g., custodians responsible for ensuring locks work during daily work).*
- d. Plans to identify collaboration with first responders, including how the first responders will gain access to the building, a school safety and security contact/liaison, and how the first responders will access building maps, site plans, and/or critical incident maps.*
- e. Establish an emergency mass notification plan.*
- f. First responder inclusions in annual drill.*
- g. Internal assessment of functional EOP drill performance, evaluation, and improvement.*
- h. Annual review of vulnerabilities in collaboration with law enforcement or emergency management and physical measures used to strengthen school security.*
- i. Plans for schools to coordinate with local law enforcement to determine functioning of in-building two-way emergency responder communication coverage for all areas in which students and staff may regularly be.*

The Task Force acknowledged the execution of a robust emergency operation plan in the event of an emergency is critical in mitigating negative outcomes. The Task Force indicated more guidance from the Department of Education by way of administrative rule would help strengthen and empower local schools to have the best, most hardy plan to serve that school's needs.

School representatives and law enforcement members of the Task Force discussed the need for robust relationships between local law enforcement, first responders, and the schools. The Task Force strongly encourages all schools, law enforcement, and first responders across the state to establish supportive and substantive relationships with one another. A strong school-first responder relationship will facilitate open communication, enable the use of proactive prevention strategies, and allow for timely responses to incidents, ultimately creating a more secure learning environment for students and staff.

5

It is the recommendation of the Task Force that all door hardware that allows a perpetrator to chain, block, or otherwise restrict access or egress should be modified to eliminate this threat.

While compliant with the building and fire code, certain door systems may grant perpetrators the ability to use simple means to barricade themselves or their victims in an area, while preventing first responder access. Relatively cost-effective changes can be made to eliminate this potential threat.

6

It is recommended the legislature consider legislation requiring all exterior doors of attendance centers shall be identified from the exterior and interior. Exterior numbers shall be visible from adjacent streets and driveways. It is the recommendation of the Task Force that best practice is to number the primary door as one, then numbering in a sequential clockwise manner. It is recommended to use a numbering size of at least 12 inches high and of reflective value visible from the exterior side of exterior doors. Numbering should be current and up to date in the emergency operations plan shared with law enforcement.

When a school safety emergency occurs, first responders from all areas, not just the local departments, converge on the school. Many first responders will have never been to that school facility prior to being called to an emergency. The Task Force determined exterior door numbering is important for school safety as it facilitates communication and enables emergency responders to quickly locate the appropriate door to enter the building and assist. In addition, the clear and standardized labeling expedites evacuation procedures while minimizing confusion during critical events.

7

It is recommended the legislature consider legislation requiring all interior doors of attendance centers shall be labeled and visible from the exterior and interior. Labeling should be current and up to date in emergency operation plans shared with law enforcement.

Similar to exterior doors, emergency responders, as well as students and staff, must be able to identify their location at all times. Labeling the inside of the doors allows students and staff to inform emergency responders of their location without entering the hallway to check the room number.

8

It is recommended the legislature consider legislation requiring schools ensure each instructional area within an attendance center, including outdoor areas such as playgrounds, is equipped with the ability for staff to send and receive communication to and from the office in emergency situations.

Most instructional areas in school buildings have access to hard-wired telephones that would satisfy the requirement for communications with the office. However, non-classroom settings,

such as gymnasiums and playgrounds, may lack means of communication. Many schools could satisfy this recommendation with two-way radios. The Task Force also discussed the recommendation could be satisfied by authorizing staff in these areas to carry cell phones. Regarding cell phone use, the Task Force would offer a word of caution knowing that during an emergency, cell phone traffic can rise exponentially and quickly overwhelm tower sites.

9

This Task Force has agreed that shatter/intrusion resistant film or capabilities is an effective way to thwart forced entry of a perpetrator. It is the recommendation of the Task Force that existing attendance centers evaluate the use of shatter/intrusion resistant film or otherwise have shatter/intrusion resistant capabilities on all exterior glass. This evaluation should also include interior glass, such as windows, windowed doors, and sidelights that are large enough to allow someone to enter if broken or gain access to the locking mechanism.

Contrary to some nomenclature, the recommended shatter/intrusion resistant film is not designed to be shatter, bullet, or intrusion proof. The intent of the film is to delay entry. In an active threat situation, seconds matter. This film will not ultimately stop an intruder from entering a school building, but it is a deterrent that provides a meaningful obstacle that must be overcome prior to gaining entry. By delaying access, precious seconds and minutes can be gained thereby providing additional time for students and staff to evacuate, secure in place, and notify law enforcement.

Security window films are generally made from layers of polyester mylar laminated together with an added adhesive. They come in various thicknesses and can be installed on the inside surface of the glass, or on both sides for added strength. Upon glass replacement, new glass can be installed, which already has these enhanced capabilities. This film comes at a significant cost and existing school facilities must engage in a cost-benefit analysis that prioritizes its application at high-risk locations.

10

This Task Force has agreed that locking classroom doors is an essential component regarding classroom safety and security. It is the recommendation of the Task Force that all schools evaluate the installation of locks that allow the door to be locked from the classroom side without a key, tool, or special knowledge or effort for each attendance center. The unlocking and unlatching from the classroom side of the door can be accomplished without the use of a key, tool, or special knowledge or effort, even if remotely engaged. Locksets installed on classroom doors should have the ability to be opened from outside the classroom using a key, code, credential, or other method of deactivation. Locksets shall allow for single motion egress. It is the recommendation of the Task Force that the legislature consider legislation requiring such locks be installed when classroom doors or locks are being replaced, on doorways as part of a planned structural renovation project, and in new attendance centers.

According to the Sandy Hook Advisory Commission report, there has never been a recorded instance of an active shooter successfully breaching a locked classroom door during a school

shooting. This finding highlights the importance of locking doors and establishing classrooms as a safe space as a key safety measure. The locks described in this recommendation currently comply with the current building code as well as the Americans with Disability Act (ADA). The Task Force reviewed and discussed several potential changes to the building code to allow aftermarket door barricades. The overwhelming consensus was that building code and ADA-compliant door locks remain the best practice for Iowa schools and that aftermarket barricades, while being an immediate and cheaper alternative, can create unintended risks and consequences. The Task Force does not recommend an exception to the current building code that would permit the use of aftermarket barricades.

PLANNED STRUCTURAL RENOVATION AND NEW CONSTRUCTION REQUIREMENTS

11

It is the recommendation of the Task Force the legislature consider legislation requiring new attendance centers incorporate a secure vestibule system designed to provide for identification and vetting of visitors before they enter. The vestibule shall include a two-way audio and video communication system and electronic door release systems for visitor access. Additionally, any glass included in the vestibule below 7 feet shall be shatter /intrusion resistant.

School vestibules constructed with an emphasis on security will vastly improve the safety of students and staff. By controlling access through the vestibule and two-way audio and video communication capabilities, the risk of a security breach is significantly reduced.

Consistent with recommendation #9, shatter/intrusion resistant capabilities remain imperative. When constructing new vestibules, schools should consider installing shatter-resistant glass thereby decreasing the cost of installing aftermarket films.

12

It is the recommendation of the Task Force that planned structural renovations to attendance centers should evaluate the incorporation of a secure vestibule system designed to provide for identification and vetting of visitors before they enter. The vestibule shall include a two-way audio and video communication system and electronic door release systems for visitor access. Additionally, any glass included in the vestibule below 7 feet shall be shatter/intrusion resistant.

The Task Force intentionally recommended secured vestibules only be required in new construction, rather than in existing facilities or planned structural renovations. In some instances, the addition of a secured vestibule is not possible based on the layout of the school facility. This does not, however, minimize the important role secured vestibules play in school safety. Schools should take this into consideration during their evaluation and design of contemplated renovations.

13

All video surveillance shall be conducted in a manner consistent with applicable state and federal laws. It is the recommendation of the Task Force that in planned structural renovations and new construction, interior video surveillance coverage should extend beyond entry points to monitor areas that are not within the normal view of staff or security personnel, such as hallways and enclosed stairwells. Exterior surveillance should include the school facilities and parking areas. Video surveillance systems should have the ability to provide access to the local first responder community in the event of an active health or safety emergency event.

The Task Force agreed video surveillance is of nominal use in preventing an active event. It can, however, serve as a general deterrent and be of use during the investigation of serious events. This recommendation does not require new construction and planned structural renovations to implement video surveillance. Rather, if a school elects to implement a video surveillance system, it should be designed to provide broad coverage and allow access to law enforcement during an emergency event. Sharing video access can be accomplished through remote access or by allowing access at the school facility.

14

It is the recommendation of the Task Force that the legislature consider legislation requiring all new construction or planned structural renovations of attendance centers include shatter/intrusion resistant capabilities on exterior access level glass and interior glass, such as windows, windowed doors, and sidelights that are adjacent to or near a door and are large enough, if broken, to allow someone to enter or access the locking mechanism.

While it is recommended above that schools evaluate the use of shatter/intrusion resistant films or glass at existing attendance centers, the Task Force determined this should be required for new construction and planned structural renovations. The shatter/intrusion resistant film or glass currently on the market can delay perpetrator entry time by approximately two to six minutes. This delay is critically important in providing additional time for students and staff to take action while providing law enforcement time to respond.