

A circular inset image on the left side of the page shows a school hallway. The hallway has blue lockers on the left, brick pillars, and a tiled floor. A security camera is visible on the ceiling.

Checklist

Preventing and Preparing for School Shootings

All acts of violence are tragic, but few events shock the nation like school shootings. While these tragedies are difficult to predict, prevention techniques continue to emerge from national studies. Administrators at your K-12 school can use this checklist to help assess and improve school shooting prevention and preparedness efforts.

For each item in the checklist, check the appropriate box (“Yes,” “No,” or “N/A (Not Applicable)”) and note any additional needed actions in the space to the right. If the answer is “no,” consider whether further action, such as talking to a school security expert or your school’s legal counsel, is necessary.

Develop an Emergency Operations Plan

An emergency operations plan (EOP) outlines the responsibilities and duties of your school and its employees in responding to emergency situations before, during, and after they occur. By establishing guidelines and systems, the EOP allows staff to react promptly, systematically, and confidently in an emergency.

Address active shooter situations in your school’s EOP. For more information, consult with legal counsel and a school security expert and see the Department of Education’s (ED’s) [Guide for Developing High-Quality Emergency Operations Plans](#).

Does your school have a written EOP? Yes No NA

• Does the plan have a tailored approach for different districts, campuses, and buildings, so the plan isn’t a one-size-fits-all approach? Yes No NA

• Does the plan address critical response practices, such as:

- Lockdowns, including how lockdowns will be announced, how classrooms will be locked, how students in open areas will shelter, additional instructions such as turning off lights and silencing phones, and details about how lockdowns will vary for different circumstances? (For more information on securing classroom doors, review United Educators’ (UE’s) [Secure Classroom Doors to Stop Active Shooters](#).) Yes No NA

• Shelter in place (where a lockdown may not be necessary but people need to stay where they are, for example during a campus search or nearby emergency), including any supplies needed for sheltering, how to locate or move students who aren’t in class, and identifying the safe spaces? Yes No NA

• Evacuations, including requirements for posting of exit routes? Yes No NA

• Notification and warning systems, including how active shooter notifications will be communicated to students, staff, classrooms, and parents? Yes No NA

• Parent-student reunification and related communications? Yes No NA

• Mobilization of mental health services? Yes No NA

• Does the plan include providing emotional and mental health services for all community members? Yes No NA

Does your school train its personnel in the EOP and hold them accountable for knowing their roles and following the plan when it is activated by conducting regular tabletop exercises or drills? (For more information, see UE’s Crisis Response Planning: A Guide for Conducting Tabletop Exercises and UE’s Active Shooter Response Options and Training.)

- Yes
- No
- NA

• Are local law enforcement and other first responders invited to join in the exercises?

- Yes
- No
- NA

• Are the results and feedback from the exercises documented and used to improve your school’s emergency response plans?

- Yes
- No
- NA

Is the plan regularly reviewed and updated to correct deficiencies and make improvements in line with any changes and new guidelines or other external recommendations?

- Yes
- No
- NA

• Is the plan easily accessible in the event of an emergency?

- Yes
- No
- NA

Strengthen Security Practices

Beyond an overall emergency plan, security plans that address physical premises are critically important to help prevent a school shooting or enable a quicker response if one occurs. Draft these policies in consultation with legal counsel and a security expert, and continuously assess and practice any plan to ensure it is current and effective. For more information about physical security protocol, see UE’s [Checklist: Physical Security](#).

Scrutinize Your Security Policies

Do your school’s security policies address physical aspects, such as:

• All areas of the campus including:

• Building entries?

- Yes
- No
- NA

• Building exteriors?

- Yes
- No
- NA

• Hallways?

- Yes
- No
- NA

• Classrooms and other interior rooms, such as restrooms and offices?

- Yes
- No
- NA

• Any physical special needs of the student population (and other people who access your school) with physical, intellectual, or other disabilities impacting their ability to shelter or evacuate?

- Yes
- No
- NA

Do the security policies address school personnel by:

- Creating a security management team, with a designated lead official to oversee security efforts? Yes
 No
 NA

- Establishing the roles and responsibilities that all school personnel have in protection and prevention of violence? Yes
 No
 NA

- Analyzing whether to hire school resource officers (SROs) or arm certain staff members? (This analysis may include considerations such as campus size, your school's proximity to law enforcement, and the impact an SRO may have on your school culture.) Yes
 No
 NA

Are the security policies consistent with state law? (For more information about statutory requirements, consult legal counsel and review the National Conference on State Legislatures [interactive graphic on school safety legislation](#).) Yes
 No
 NA

As part of its overall security plan, does your school have policies that cover:

- Weapons possession/use? Yes
 No
 NA

- Banned substances (including alcohol, tobacco, and drugs)? Yes
 No
 NA

- Bullying and harassment? Yes
 No
 NA

- Hazing? Yes
 No
 NA

- Cyberbullying, cyberharassment, and cyberstalking? Yes
 No
 NA

- Sexual assault, sexual misconduct, and sexual harassment? Yes
 No
 NA

- Discrimination and bias incidents? Yes
 No
 NA

- Social media abuse? Yes
 No
 NA

- Criminal acts? Yes
 No
 NA

Regularly Review Your School's Security Policies

Actions Needed

Do the security policies establish a regular process to:

- Review the policies for deficiencies or new threats?
 Yes
 No
 NA
- Update the policies to conform to changing research and guidance, especially from national school safety organizations?
 Yes
 No
 NA
- Analyze the policies with the help of a security expert and legal counsel?
 Yes
 No
 NA

Does your school conduct regular site assessments with a safety or facilities expert to:

- Examine the threats and hazards your school and surrounding community have faced or may face?
 Yes
 No
 NA
- Include an evaluation of the characteristics that could make your school susceptible to the identified threats, including:
 - Structure?
 Yes
 No
 NA
 - Equipment?
 Yes
 No
 NA
 - Information technology or electrical systems?
 Yes
 No
 NA
 - Grounds?
 Yes
 No
 NA
 - Surrounding area?
 Yes
 No
 NA

- Consider whether your school has weaknesses such as:
 - Doors that don't lock from the inside? Yes
 No
 NA

- Classrooms without "hard corners" or other safe spaces out of the line of sight of the doorway? Yes
 No
 NA

- Windows in doors or regular windows not equipped with a device to block the line of sight during a lockdown? Yes
 No
 NA

- Ineffective communications systems? Yes
 No
 NA

- Line-of-sight issues for surveillance cameras? Yes
 No
 NA

- Broken fences or gates? Yes
 No
 NA

- Traffic patterns that impede access by emergency responders? Yes
 No
 NA

Engage Law Enforcement

- Does your school meet annually with local police and fire departments to discuss security and emergency response? Yes
 No
 NA
-
- Do you have a point of contact in each department? Yes
 No
 NA
-
- Do you provide local police, fire, and emergency response personnel with in-person tours or copies of building floor plans, blueprints, evacuation routes, shelter sites, and other relevant information? Yes
 No
 NA
-
- Have you established a plan for information-sharing with law enforcement during an emergency? (Consider setting up an annual meeting to build connections and review the EOP other emergency protocols.) Yes
 No
 NA

Form Community Partnerships

- Does your school regularly engage with community organizations to understand the resources and services available, especially those that focus on juvenile justice, mental health, and social services? Yes
 No
 NA
-
- Have you considered implementing an interagency information-sharing agreement to exchange vital information about students of concern with law enforcement, mental health service providers, and social services agencies? Yes
 No
 NA

Train Teachers, Staff, and Students

Does your school require routine training for all students and staff that includes:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Active shooter preparedness programs? 	<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/> NA
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is the active shooter training age-appropriate for students? (For help selecting an appropriate response and training approach, see UE’s suggestions about Active Shooter Response Options and Training.) 	<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/> NA
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does the active shooter training comply with state law? (Consult legal counsel if you’re unsure about statutory requirements.) 	<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/> NA
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information about escape routes, safe haven locations, and reunification areas? 	<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/> NA
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lessons for staff on how to prevent, recognize, and respond to indicators or threats of violence? 	<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/> NA
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Specific training for teachers and staff about their roles and responsibilities before, during, and after an emergency? 	<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/> NA
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> First-aid training for teachers and staff, including the “Stop the Bleed” trainings the Department of Homeland Security recommended? 	<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/> NA
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information for teachers and staff about how to recognize and respond appropriately to signs and symptoms of mental illness or distress? 	<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/> NA
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tactical Emergency Casualty Care (TECC) training for staff to respond in an active shooter or mass casualty incident? 	<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/> NA
<p>Does your school require that all staff – including substitute teachers, office staff, food service staff, and custodial staff – participate in the trainings?</p>	<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/> NA
<p>Does your school follow all trainings with improvements and corrective actions identified during the exercise?</p>	<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/> NA
<p>Do you involve community partners, including local law enforcement, in training exercises when possible?</p>	<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/> NA
<p>Does your school distribute reference guides to highlight key information and action steps from the training?</p>	<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/> NA

Does your school post key information, including evacuation routes and shelter-in-place procedures and locations, throughout school buildings? Yes No NA

For schools that employ SROs or School Security Officers (SSOs):

• Have you clarified the roles, responsibilities, and plans for information-sharing through a memorandum of understanding? Yes No NA

• Are the requirements for their training and responsibilities detailed in a written policy? Yes No NA

• Are administrators and teachers taught how to work collaboratively with them? Yes No NA

Develop a Safe School Culture

While physical security precautions are often at the top of prevention lists, school administrators also must focus on creating a positive culture that promotes emotional connectedness between students, teachers, and staff.

When students and employees feel a positive emotional connection to their school community, it creates a culture of shared responsibility that serves as a protective factor. A 2021 U.S. Secret Service analysis of student plots found that nearly one-half of students plotting an attack were bullied, and that frequently a grievance against a peer led to the plot. That analysis also found that students are best positioned to identify and report concerning behavior by classmates, and that they often reported it to their own parent or to someone at school. For this reason, **prevention measures must include anti-bullying efforts, student mental health initiatives, and a focus on reporting.**

What Is a Threat Assessment?

A threat assessment is a method of violence prevention that involves identifying, assessing, and managing students who may pose a threat of targeted violence in schools. The goals are to keep schools safe and to help students manage the underlying issues causing the threatening behavior. For more information, see UE's [A Checklist for K-12 Schools Implementing a Student Threat Assessment Process](#) and UE's [Q&A With an Expert on Preventing School Shootings](#).

Conduct a Climate Assessment

Do you conduct an annual school climate survey to assess strengths, identify areas that need improvement, and monitor progress? Yes No NA

• Have you used the results to correct deficiencies? Yes No NA

Create a Connected School Culture

Actions Needed

Does your school foster an environment that meets students' social and emotional needs, including:

- Creating connections between adults and students, for example working to ensure that all students feel they have a trusting relationship with at least one adult at school? Yes
 No
 NA
 - Emphasizing the importance of listening? Yes
 No
 NA
 - Preventing and intervening in bullying? Yes
 No
 NA
 - Addressing interpersonal conflicts between students through de-escalation programs? Yes
 No
 NA
 - Taking a strong stance against the “code of silence” by encouraging students to report contemplated violence? Yes
 No
 NA
 - Striving for daily positive social and emotional interactions between students, staff, and teachers, to create an environment where people believe others know and care for them? (In this environment, community members will be likelier to report concerns.) Yes
 No
 NA
- Have you adopted effective social and emotional learning (SEL) strategies (this might include a curriculum to teach specific SEL skills and practices to help students develop a growth mindset)? Yes
 No
 NA

Combat Bullying

- Have you implemented clear anti-bullying policies? Yes
 No
 NA
- Do these policies include cyberbullying? Yes
 No
 NA
- Does your school use anti-bullying programs or curricula for students? Yes
 No
 NA
- Do the lessons address digital citizenship? Yes
 No
 NA
 - Since peer influence and engagement can be powerful, are students involved in leading anti-bullying efforts? Yes
 No
 NA

Do you teach students to report bullying incidents they may witness as bystanders? Yes
 No
 NA

Do you empower staff to take an active role in responding to bullying incidents? Yes
 No
 NA

Address Mental Health

Do you actively work to increase awareness of mental health issues among students, and ways to seek care for these issues? Yes
 No
 NA

Do you provide early opportunities for students exhibiting potential mental health problems to receive adequate support from licensed or certified professionals? Yes
 No
 NA

Do you have a policy in place to refer students to outside mental health services and support as needed? Yes
 No
 NA

Promote Reporting

Are your school’s mechanisms for reporting threats or concerning behavior easy to understand and use? Yes
 No
 NA

- Do you have multiple methods to report (phone, text, email, web, phone app, etc.), including an anonymous reporting option? Yes
 No
 NA

- Are some of the reporting options usable by people outside your school, including parents and community members? Yes
 No
 NA

Do you conduct outreach specifically targeting parents so that parents can recognize and report concerns about their own students or others? Yes
 No
 NA

Have you trained students, staff, and parents about:

- Reporting methods? Yes
 No
 NA

- What to report? Yes
 No
 NA

- Do you teach how to identify warning signs and concerning behavior? Yes
 No
 NA

- Do you emphasize that threats and concerning behavior should be reported? Yes
 No
 NA

• Bystander reporting?	<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/> NA
• Does student training emphasize the difference between “telling on” someone and seeking help?	<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/> NA
• Do you provide reassurance that reporting in good faith won’t result in discipline, even if the concern turns out to be nothing?	<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/> NA
• Do the reporting mechanisms allow for reporting of cyberbullying?	<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/> NA
Are reports funneled through a centralized process?	<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/> NA
• Are protocols in place for continually monitoring the reporting tool(s) and following up on reports?	<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/> NA
• Have you determined a threshold for law enforcement involvement?	<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/> NA

Manage Threats

Attackers often engage in concerning behavior prior to the violence, so all reports must be evaluated. Threat assessment teams serve this function by gathering and analyzing information about concerning behavior from sources across campus and creating processes for intervening and managing the risk.

The training and composition of the threat assessment team is critical to its effectiveness. For detailed information on creating a threat assessment process, see UE’s [A Checklist for K-12 Schools Implementing a Student Threat Assessment Process](#).

Develop a Threat Assessment Plan

Does your school have a written threat assessment process that the designated team can follow? (ED offers detailed guidance on threat assessment processes in schools.)	<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/> NA
• Is the process proactive and focused on identifying and evaluating concerning behaviors in addition to reacting to threatening incidents? (Studies show that a small percentage of school shooters actually make direct threats but most shooters display behavior that draws concern from others.)	<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/> NA

Actions Needed

- Does the plan define prohibited behaviors that need immediate intervention and concerning behaviors that may indicate the need for a threat assessment? Yes
 No
 NA

- Does the plan set a low threshold of concern so that the plan is activated to address a variety of concerning behaviors and not simply exigent ones? Yes
 No
 NA

Does the plan include a standardized process to gather detailed information about a person of concern, the situation, the setting, and the target? Yes
 No
 NA

- Does the plan include procedures for:
 - Proper documentation? Yes
 No
 NA

- Identification of information sources including:
 - Record review? Yes
 No
 NA

- Interview(s)? Yes
 No
 NA

Does the threat assessment process include steps for an action plan? Yes
 No
 NA

- Does the process include a safety and support plan for the target of the threat? Yes
 No
 NA

- Does the process include a safety and support plan for the threatening individual? Yes
 No
 NA

- Does the process include protocol for when to notify or otherwise involve campus and/or local law enforcement? Yes
 No
 NA

Designate and Train a Threat Assessment Team

Does your school have a threat assessment team? (The threat assessment team implements the threat assessment plan by gathering and analyzing the information and reaching out to the involved parties.) Yes
 No
 NA

- Is the team comprised of multidisciplinary members such as administrators, teachers, attorneys, medical and mental health professionals, law enforcement personnel, and SROs (where applicable)? Yes
 No
 NA

- Does the team have permanent members, such as the Principal and School Counselor? Yes
 No
 NA

- Does the team have a specifically designated leader (ideally a senior administrator)? Yes No NA

Does your school clearly define the roles and responsibilities within the threat assessment team, including for the team’s leadership? Yes No NA

Do you train team members? Yes No NA

- Does the training include interactive activities such as role-playing and tabletop exercises of different scenario threat assessments? Yes No NA

- Do you hire a threat assessment expert – such as a mental health or law enforcement professional – to train and advise the threat assessment team? (For specific threats, UE members also may be eligible for complimentary threat assessment services through the **ProResponse benefit**.) Yes No NA

Does the team meet on a regular basis, even if there are no new threat reports to discuss? Yes No NA

Use a Student Information Sharing System

Does your school have a centralized electronic student information system that the threat assessment team uses to document and identify behavioral, academic, and safety concerns? Yes No NA

Is the system accessible to all relevant parties, including principals, assistant principals, teachers, counselors, psychologists, coaches, and SROs? Yes No NA

Does the system allow for documenting student behavior concerns, conduct violations, interventions, academic concerns, threat assessment results, and safety and support action plans? Yes No NA

Create a Crisis Communications Plan

Actions Needed

A crisis communication plan is a set of protocols that guide your school's internal and external communications during an emergency. The plan sets forth the roles and responsibilities of the communications team and spokespeople, so that appropriate and consistent information can be shared quickly with parents, students, staff, media, and other relevant audiences. For more details on elements of a crisis communications plan, see the National Association of Independent Schools' [Crisis Communications Strategies for an Always-On Media Environment](#).

Does your school have a crisis communication plan? Yes
 No
 NA

• Does the plan include:

• Information about how families will be contacted during and/or after an emergency? Yes
 No
 NA

• A response team of staff with expertise in communications? Yes
 No
 NA

• Influential administrators who may be spokespeople in a crisis? Yes
 No
 NA

• Examples of messaging to be used for a school shooting? Yes
 No
 NA

• Different means of communications that will be used to convey necessary information? Yes
 No
 NA

• A media strategy covering who will talk to the press, when that will happen, what information will be released, what methods will be used for communication? Yes
 No
 NA

Is your school's public address system able to broadcast inside all school buildings (including classrooms, hallways, portable classrooms, and common areas) and outside on all school fields and grounds? Yes
 No
 NA

• Is the public address system accessible from many locations, including classrooms? (Ideally, there should be two-way communications systems in every classroom and student assembly area.) Yes
 No
 NA

Does your school regularly test its communications equipment and methods? Yes
 No
 NA

More From UE

Active Shooter Response Options and Training

Checklist: Physical Security

Secure Classroom Doors to Stop Active Shooters

A Checklist for K-12 Schools Implementing a Student Threat Assessment Process

Student Threat Assessment Teams online course

Additional Resources

Averting Targeted School Violence: A U.S. Secret Service Analysis of Plots Against Schools (2021)

ED: Guide for Developing High-Quality School Emergency Operations Plans

Colorado School Safety Resource Center: Essentials of School Threat Assessment Preventing Targeted School Violence

FBI: Violence Prevention in Schools

U.S. Secret Service National Threat Assessment Center: Enhancing School Safety Using a Threat Assessment Model An Operational Guide for Preventing Targeted School Violence

Cybersecurity & Infrastructure Security Agency: K-12 School Security Guide and School Security Survey

Final Report of the Federal Commission on School Safety

By **Christine McHugh, Esq.**, Senior Risk Management Counsel. Christine's areas of expertise include employment law, sexual assault prevention, protection of minors, traumatic brain injury, and diversity, equity, and inclusion. Before joining the Risk Research team, she handled UE liability claims for several years. She previously practiced employment and higher education law.



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