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# Department of Homeland Security Resources for School Security and Safety

## Introduction

Congressional interest in K-12 public school security has increased following a number of recent school shootings. Even though public school security is primarily a state and local responsibility, several federal departments, agencies, and entities provide school security resources. These federal entities include the departments of Education, Justice, and Homeland Security. Specifically, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) provides a number of resources to assist state and local governments in securing public schools.

Following the Parkland, FL, shooting, DHS issued a press release that stated:

In the wake of the recent attack in Parkland, Florida, the Department of Homeland Security is stepping up actions to better protect our nation's schools against gun violence, as well as other potential threats. DHS conducts training, exercises, and preparedness activities year-round to increase the security of schools across the country and the communities in which they are located.

To coordinate DHS' public school security activities, the department established an Executive Steering Committee. The committee, according to the DHS press release, "will drive DHS school security efforts." DHS provides assistance for school security in four broad categories: Education and Community Awareness; Capacity Building, Training, and Exercises; Preparedness Grants; and Early Warning and Reporting. This In Focus is intended to be an overview of DHS public school security resources. It should be noted that, in some instances, there is little publicly available information on some of these resources, programs, and activities.

## Education and Community Awareness

DHS states that it engages school administrators, teachers, students, parents, and communities to raise awareness, communicate best practices, and promote what DHS describes as no-cost/low-cost security measures. These education and community awareness activities include:

- **Youth Preparedness Council:** DHS, through the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), created this council in 2012 to engage young leaders who are interested in supporting emergency preparedness in their communities and schools. The council provides an avenue to engage young people by taking into account their perspectives, feedback, and opinions. The members meet with FEMA staff throughout the school year to provide input on strategies, initiatives, and projects. Additionally, members attend FEMA's annual council summit in Washington, DC.
- **School Transportation Security Outreach:** DHS provides guidelines and other materials to school districts and transportation providers on school bus security. One of the guidelines provided to school districts and transportation providers is the "Employee Guide to School Bus Security" issued by DHS's Transportation Security Administration.
- **DHS Protective Security Advisors:** DHS's Office of Infrastructure Protection operates the Protective Security Advisor Program (PSA). PSAs are critical infrastructure and vulnerability subject matter experts who coordinate and facilitate local activities that advise state, local, and private sector officials. The PSA program's primary mission is to plan, coordinate, and conduct security risk assessments of nationally significant critical infrastructure. PSAs, however, also provide planning and outreach activities to communities and community services such as public schools.
- **Homeland Security Academic Advisory Council (HSAAC):** DHS, in partnership with the Department of Education, is looking to expand the current council membership to include state and local public school administrators, private and parochial school leadership, and K-12 educational associations. The HSAAC provides advice and recommendations to the DHS Secretary and departmental senior leadership on matters related to homeland security and the academic community, including student and recent graduate recruitment; international students; academic research and faculty exchanges; campus resilience; homeland security academic programs; and cybersecurity.
- **Campus Resilience Program:** The Campus Resilience Program is a DHS effort to engage institutions of higher education in developing and testing an emergency preparedness and resilience planning processes. DHS's Office of Academic Engagement manages this program and is meant to assist colleges and universities in

- **Hometown Security Program:** DHS develops partnerships, through outreach activities, between the private and public sectors in order to mitigate risks and enhance the security and resilience of public sites and events. DHS provides counsel and recommendations about protective measures that the private and public sector can implement to protect venues and such facilities as public schools.

building, sustaining, and promoting resiliency. DHS is considering expanding this collegiate program to include K-12 schools, and coordinate outreach for schools to access federal support for school security activities.

## Capacity Building, Training, and Exercises

DHS provides direct support to states and localities to enhance school security through training, exercises, and workshops. This support includes:

- **Training:** DHS provides emergency planning, active shooter awareness, mass casualty incident response, and suspicious behavior training. Training is provided online, in-residence at FEMA’s Emergency Management Institute and DHS’s Federal Law Enforcement Training Center, and through local training by law enforcement and security professionals.
- **Tabletop Exercises and Workshops:** DHS hosts and supports exercises and workshops throughout the nation to discuss security protocols, notifications and alerts, and response and recovery capabilities with state and local governments, first responders, and schools.
- **Tactical Emergency Casualty Care Program:** DHS provides high-threat medical training to first responders and emergency medical professionals that respond to incidents at schools and in other areas within communities. Past attendees have included school administrators and teachers, law enforcement officials, and hospital personnel.

## Preparedness Grants

DHS provides funding to state, local, tribal, and territorial governments through preparedness grants. These grants can be used for training, exercises, planning, personnel, and equipment to prepare for threats and hazards such as an active shooter incident at a school. Specifically, DHS’ State Homeland Security Grant Program, the Urban Area Security Initiative, and the Emergency Management Performance Grant Program provide funding for states, localities, tribes, and territories for these preparedness activities; none of these grants are directly available to public schools. Instead, states and localities must identify school security activities as a priority, and with DHS approval, grant funding then could be used for school security activities. There is, however, no publicly available data on the amount grant recipients have used for school security activities.

## Early Warning and Reporting

DHS, in coordination with academic and law enforcement entities, is developing processes for identifying and reporting individuals with concerning behavior or other signs of pre-attack planning. Additionally, DHS is conducting the following activities:

- DHS is developing a nationwide public awareness campaign modeled on the department’s “See Something, Say Something” initiative to encourage students, school staff, and communities to report suspicious activity and behavior.
- DHS and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) gather, document, process, analyze, and share suspicious activity reporting (SAR) through the Nationwide SAR Initiative.
- DHS provides intelligence products, analysis, and alerts to national stakeholders regarding violent activity, incidents, and trends which may be used to identify concerning behavior or other signs of pre-attack planning.
- DHS is drafting an operational guide that is to provide school staff, law enforcement personnel, and other public safety officials with plans for schools to develop threat assessment teams. The guide is intended for schools and communities to establish central reporting mechanisms, define thresholds for law enforcement intervention, and identify intervention and management strategies for decreasing the risk of a targeted attack on public schools.
- DHS is conducting a research study on school attacks that will examine select incidents. The purpose of the study is to identify information regarding an attacker’s motives, prior behaviors, situational factors, and other variables that will enhance prevention efforts and early warning.

## Select DHS School Security Products

Currently, some DHS entities such as FEMA and the U.S. Secret Service provide guides and reports on school violence, emergencies, and shootings. These products include:

- FEMA, *Guide For Developing High-Quality School Emergency Operations Plans*.
- U.S. Secret Service, *The Final Report and Findings of the Safe School Initiative: Implications for the Prevention of School Attacks in the United States*.
- U.S. Secret Service, *Prior Knowledge of Potential School-Based Violence: Information Students Learn May Prevent a Targeted Attack*.
- U.S. Secret Service, *Campus Attacks: Targeted Violence Affecting Institutions of Higher Education*.

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