



Ten Essential Actions to Improve School Safety

Guidance for Montana Schools

Emotional Security	Physical Safety
Establish and maintain a positive school climate	Develop a comprehensive school emergency operations plan
Establish a multi-tiered system of support for meeting student behavioral health needs	Coordinate with Local Emergency Planning Committees and Local and Tribal Health Departments
Actively identify students and staff in need of support	Coordinate with first responders and local and tribal law enforcement
Establish and maintain accessible and supportive communication channels	Practice campus, building, and classroom security
Implement policies for monitoring and responding to online and social media concerns	Conduct school disaster drills

Establish and maintain a positive school climate

Creating a positive school climate is one of the most important steps a school can take to improving school safety. A positive school climate emphasizes connectedness and equality, with every student and staff member feeling like a valued member of the school community. Providing time for students to develop positive relationships with school staff and embracing the cultural beliefs and values of each student can help create a positive school climate.

Resources:

- [School Climate](#): Strategies to consider, guidance, and tools to create a positive school climate
- [Culturally Responsive Leading and Learning](#): Guidance on incorporating student & family culture and voice into learning

Establish a multi-tiered system of support for meeting student behavioral health needs

By establishing a multi-tiered system of support (MTSS), schools can address the range of behavioral health needs of students. School-wide Tier 1 supports can positively impact the wellbeing of all students and help prevent behavioral health concerns from developing. When behavioral health concerns do arise, having the necessary partnerships and protocols in place to appropriately respond to the student’s changing level of need across the MTSS framework (Tier 2 and Tier 3) is essential to making school safer.

Resources:

- [Multi-Tiered Systems of Support \(MTSS\) Framework](#) for Montana schools
- [School Mental Health](#): Resources for supporting and promoting school mental health
- [Mental Health](#): Strategies to consider and resources for improving access to mental health services in schools

Actively identify students and staff in need of support

When a student or staff member displays or reports concerning behaviors, it is important schools have protocols in place to assess the potential safety risk and respond quickly and appropriately. Schools are encouraged to form a multidisciplinary team and establish standard procedures, such as a threat assessment or school-wide screening protocols, to identify students and staff who may be experiencing distress and link them to the supports necessary to keep everyone safe. Schools can also post state and national crisis lines in highly visible places to improve safety.

Resources:

- [Montana’s Crisis Action Toolkit on Suicide](#): Strategies and toolkits for schools to use to prevent and respond to suicide
- [Montana Crisis Phone Contacts](#): National and regional crisis response phone lines

Establish and maintain accessible and supportive communication channels

Schools can improve safety by creating bidirectional communication channels between the school and the community. It is important students, families, and staff know who to contact if they observe any perceived threats to school safety, including the potential of a student or staff member to harm him/herself or others. Some schools have established anonymous reporting systems or tip lines, where anyone can report a concern at any time.

Resources:

- [Guide for Developing High-Quality School Emergency Operations Plans](#): guidance on forming a school communication plan

Implement policies for monitoring and responding to online and social media concerns

Students and staff are more than likely spending an increasing amount of time online during and outside of school hours. Schools are encouraged to develop policies to prevent and address cyber bullying and other online behaviors that may pose a risk to school safety. Schools are also encouraged to routinely update those policies as technology and online behaviors change, and to involve students in the process of developing these policies.

Resources:

- [Bully Free Montana](#): Resources for parents, students, and schools to address bullying in schools and online
- [Bullying and Cyberbullying](#): Strategies to consider, guidance, and tools to prevent and mitigate bullying

Develop a comprehensive school emergency operations plan

A comprehensive school emergency operations plan (EOP) is foundational to improving school safety. EOPs should begin with a risk and resource assessment to identify potential safety threats and existing resources to help address those threats. It is important to establish a multidisciplinary team of people to conduct the assessments and develop a plan for prioritizing potential threats. Creating a county-wide team can help ensure all available skills and resources are utilized.

Resources:

- Emergency Operations Planning (EOP) [website](#) and [Teacher Learning Hub Course](#): Information on emergency operations planning and a step-by-step guide to creating an EOP in Montana schools

Coordinate with Local Emergency Planning Committees and Local and Tribal Health Departments

Local Emergency Planning Committees (LEPCs) and local and tribal health departments are important partners for preventing and responding to school safety threats, especially natural disasters. Schools are encouraged to include LEPCs local and tribal health departments in their EOPs and utilize the emergency preparedness and recovery services that may be available.

Resources:

- [Montana Department of Emergency Services Primary Coordinators](#) contact information
- [Montana local and tribal health department](#) contact information

Coordinate with community first responders and local and tribal law enforcement

It is important schools communicate with those who will respond in an emergency situation before an emergency takes place. Schools are encouraged to involve first responders and local and tribal law enforcement in the development of their EOP and disaster drill trainings. Establishing methods for communication before, during, and after an emergency is important for minimizing harm.

Resources:

- [Guide for Developing High-Quality School Emergency Operations Plans](#): Guidance for working with first responders and law enforcement

Practice campus, building, and classroom security

There is not a “one-size-fits-all” solution for school security and decisions for implementing security measures should be informed by a risk assessment and part of the school EOP. At a minimum, it is recommended schools take steps to make it easy to find and navigate to specific locations within a school campus. One example of this is implementing a classroom numbering system that is easily visible from inside and outside of the school building(s).

Resources:

- [Physical Security](#): Strategies to consider, guidance, and tools to implementing physical school security measures

Conduct school disaster drills

Practicing disaster drills can better prepare students and staff to follow procedures and safely react in emergency situations. Schools are encouraged to use their EOP to inform their plan for carrying out disaster drills. It is also important to consider who participates in what drills; it may not be beneficial to have students participate in all drills.

Resources:

- [Drills & Exercises](#): Guidance for conducting disaster drills in Montana schools
- [Training, Exercises, and Drills](#): Strategies to consider and resources for conducting disaster drills

This document is based on a [report](#) published by the Department of Justice and was adapted by the Montana School Safety Advisory Committee