

2022 VIRGINIA SCHOOL SAFETY AUDIT HIGHLIGHTS



2022



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INTRODUCTION

Since 1997, Virginia law has required all public schools to conduct annual school safety audits (*Code of Virginia § 22.1-279.8*). The audit process assists schools and divisions in identifying and evaluating physical safety concerns and patterns of student and staff safety perceptions.

The Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS) Virginia Center for School and Campus Safety (VCSCS), in consultation with the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE), is responsible for developing the list of items to review and evaluate as part of the school safety audit required by the *Code of Virginia*. Additionally, VCSCS has established a standardized report format for school safety audits, reporting criteria, and procedures for report submission.

VCSCS has collected school safety data for the annual School Safety Audit Program since 2005. In order to maintain the relevance of the data collected by VCSCS, the audit process is reviewed and updated each year. To date, VCSCS has developed five components for the School Safety Audit Program:

- School Safety Survey
- Division Safety Survey
- Crisis Management Plan Review and Certification
- Virginia School Survey of Climate and Working Conditions
- School Safety Inspection Checklist Completion and Certification

The school and division safety survey(s) are intended to provide schools, divisions, and DCJS with information on how best practices for school safety are being implemented across Virginia. The results of these surveys provide valuable information on training and resources needed across the state. These surveys are updated each year in anticipation of emerging best practices and to gather data to inform policymakers.

In accordance with the Code of Virginia [§ 22.1-279.8](#) paragraph D, “Each school board shall ensure that every school that it supervises shall develop a written school crisis, emergency management, and medical emergency response plan...” Additionally, “The local school board, the chief law-enforcement officer, the fire chief, the chief of the emergency medical services agency, the executive director of the relevant regional emergency medical services council, and the emergency management official of the locality, or their designees, shall annually review the written school crisis, emergency management, and medical emergency response plans.” Finally, “The local school division superintendent shall certify this review in writing to the Virginia Center for School and Campus Safety no later than August 31 of each year.”

The Virginia School Survey of Climate and Working Conditions (VSS) is administered in collaboration with VDOE and researchers from Virginia Tech. The VSS consists of a student and staff survey component. Beginning in 2021, the VSS will be administered alternating years between schools serving 9th–12th graders in even years and schools serving 6th–8th graders in odd years, with elementary school staff included in odd years. VSS results are intended to assist schools and divisions in understanding how connected students and staff feel to their school, the quality of relationships, perceptions of the learning environment, support for staff professional roles, and feelings of safety among students and staff.

Since 2013, the *Code of Virginia § 22.1-279.8 B* has required all public schools in the Commonwealth to conduct school building safety inspections using a standardized walk-through checklist provided by VCSCS. The School Safety Inspection Checklist is built upon the knowledge and training of crime prevention experts using criminal behaviors and fields of science included in the philosophy of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design¹. This checklist is required to be completed in each school a minimum of once every three years and allows schools and divisions to recognize their own unique challenges and address physical security priorities accordingly.

¹ Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) is a multi-disciplinary approach of crime prevention that uses urban and architectural design and the management of built and natural environments. <https://www.cpted.net/>

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The culmination of the Virginia School Safety Audit (“the Audit”) is a review of all components at the school and division level. Based on the results of the Audit, schools and divisions can develop responses and solutions to identified vulnerabilities, which may include recommendations for structural adjustments, changes to safety procedures, and/or revisions to the student code of conduct. All data from the Audit is available to school divisions in order to assist with informing their practices and guiding decision-making related to student and staff safety. However, the *Code of Virginia* allows for some of the data to be protected from release to the public for safety and security reasons.

Further information regarding the components of the School Safety Audit as well as copies of the survey instruments can be located on the [DCJS website](http://www.dcms.virginia.gov/virginia-center-school-and-campus-safety/virginia-school-safety-audit-program) at www.dcms.virginia.gov/virginia-center-school-and-campus-safety/virginia-school-safety-audit-program.

The 2022 Virginia School Safety Audit Highlights

The Commonwealth of Virginia consists of 132 public school divisions in addition to the Virginia Department of Juvenile Justice Division of Education, Virginia’s Academic-Year Governor’s Schools, Regional Alternative Education Programs, Regional Career and Technical Programs, and the Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind. A total of 1,982 traditional K-12 public schools and 30 non-traditional regional programs and governor’s schools operated² in Virginia during the 2021–2022 school year. According to the Virginia Department of Education’s [Fall Membership database](#), there were 1,251,970 students enrolled in public schools during the 2021–2022 school year.

This document highlights and summarizes key data from all components of the School Safety Audit, to include comparisons across components and multi-year data trends. Reports summarizing state-level results by item can be found on the [DCJS website](http://www.dcms.virginia.gov/virginia-center-school-and-campus-safety/virginia-school-safety-audit-program) at www.dcms.virginia.gov/virginia-center-school-and-campus-safety/virginia-school-safety-audit-program.

AUDIT COMPONENT	2021 PARTICIPATION	SPECIFICS
School Safety Survey	1,982 schools	
Non-Traditional School Survey	30 schools	
Division Safety Survey	132 divisions	
Crisis Management Plan – Review and Certification	132 divisions	
Virginia School Survey of Climate and Working Conditions – Staff Survey	361 schools	20,048 classroom instructors 6,104 staff
Virginia School Survey of Climate and Working Conditions – Student Survey	351 schools	219,233 students in grades 9–12
The School Safety Inspection Checklist – Completion and Certification	132 divisions	Last certified in 2020

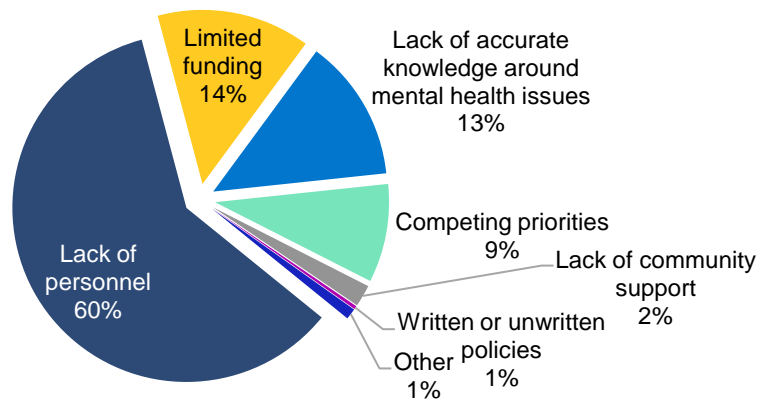
² For purposes of this survey, DCJS defined “school” as any separate physical structure that houses and instructs public school students during school hours. This is different from the Virginia Department of Education’s (VDOE) definition and is why their count of the number of schools is different. VDOE defines a school as “a publicly funded institution where students are enrolled for all or a majority of the instructional day; those students are reported in fall membership at the institution and the institution, at minimum, meets requirements adopted by the Board of Education.”

MENTAL HEALTH

The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on schools, students, and staff will continue to unfold as data is collected throughout the coming years. An area of increased focus in recent years, and even more so with the pandemic, is the mental health of students and staff. Only 63% of administrators reported that they feel their school can provide sufficient mental health support to students and staff, and only 13% of high school students reported they had participated in mental health training in the 2021–2022 school year.

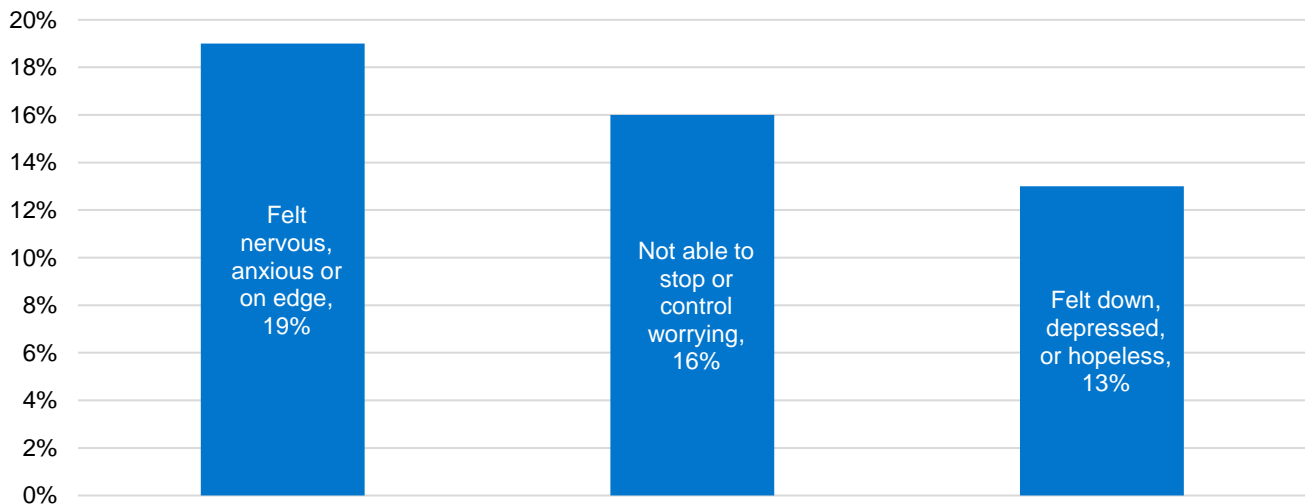
Top issues limiting schools' ability to provide sufficient mental health support to students and staff according to the 63% of administrators reporting limitations

As reported on the 2022 School Safety Survey (N=732)



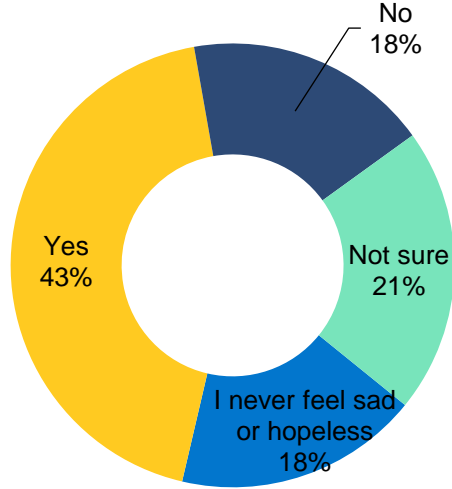
Percent of all high school students experiencing the following 'Nearly every day' over the last 2 weeks

As reported on the 2022 Virginia School Survey of Climate and Working Conditions (N=219,233)



Percent of all high school students reporting there was an adult they could turn to for help when they felt sad or hopeless in 2021–2022

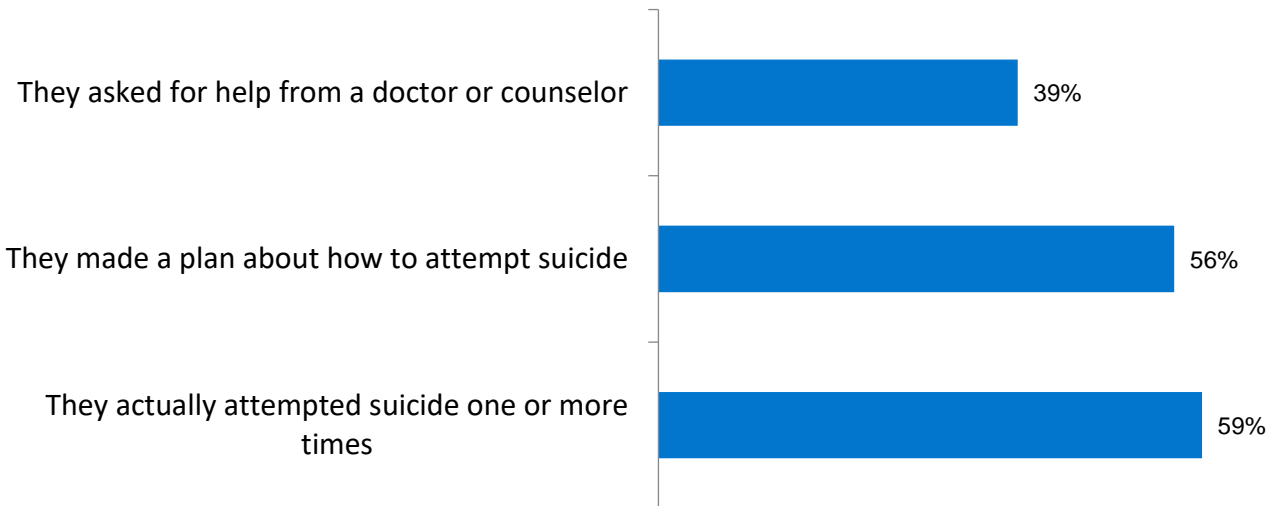
As reported on the 2022 Virginia School Survey of Climate and Working Conditions (N=219,233)



Since August 2021, eight school divisions held private suicide prevention trainings for their school personnel through VCSCS, which included ASIST and the DCJS training that follows the VDOE suicide prevention guidelines. Additionally, 52 divisions were represented at open trainings held between August 2021 and July 2022.

The 13% (27,946 students) of high school students whom reported seriously considering suicide in the past 12 months reported the following

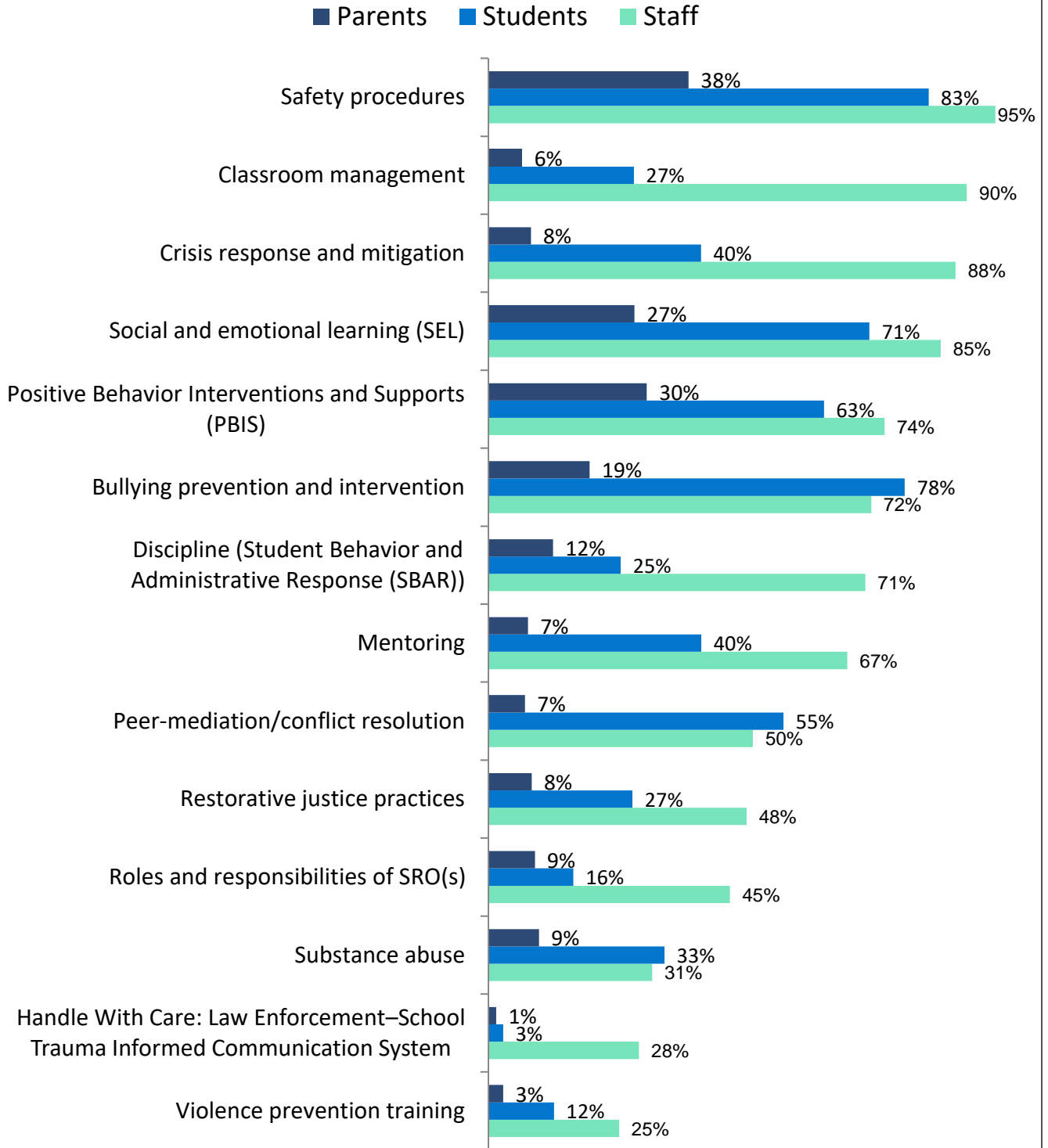
As reported on the 2022 Virginia School Survey of Climate and Working Conditions (N=27,946)



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Percent of schools providing the following training, program(s) or curriculum to each group in 2021–2022

As reported on the 2022 School Safety Survey (N=1982)



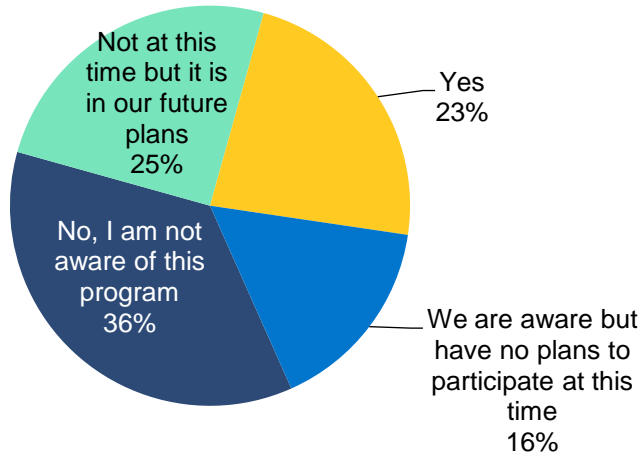
2022 VIRGINIA SCHOOL SAFETY AUDIT HIGHLIGHTS

A recent national survey of the incidence and prevalence of children’s exposure to violence and trauma revealed that 60% of American children have been exposed to violence, crime or abuse. Forty percent (40%) were direct victims of two or more violent acts. Prolonged exposure to violence and trauma can seriously undermine children’s ability to focus, behave appropriately, and learn. It often leads to school failure, truancy, suspension or expulsion, dropping out, or involvement in the juvenile justice system.

Beginning in 2021 VCSCS brought the “Handle With Care: Law Enforcement-School Trauma Informed Communication System” (HWC) to Virginia. HWC is a statewide trauma informed response to child maltreatment and children’s exposure to violence. If a law enforcement officer encounters a child during a call, that child’s information is forwarded to the school before the school bell rings the next day. The school implements individual, class and whole school trauma-sensitive curricula so that traumatized children are “Handled With Care.” If a child needs more intervention, on-site trauma-focused mental healthcare is available at the school.

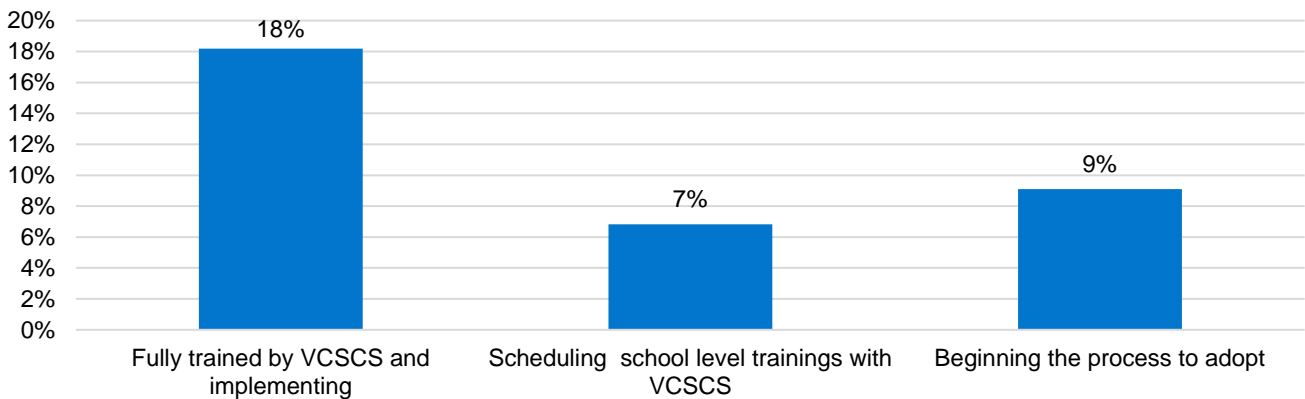
Percent of divisions participating in the "Handle With Care Law Enforcement-School Trauma Informed Communication System"

As reported on the 2022 Division Safety Survey (N=132)



Percent of divisions having adopted the "Handle With Care Law Enforcement-School Trauma Informed Communication System" in 2021–2022

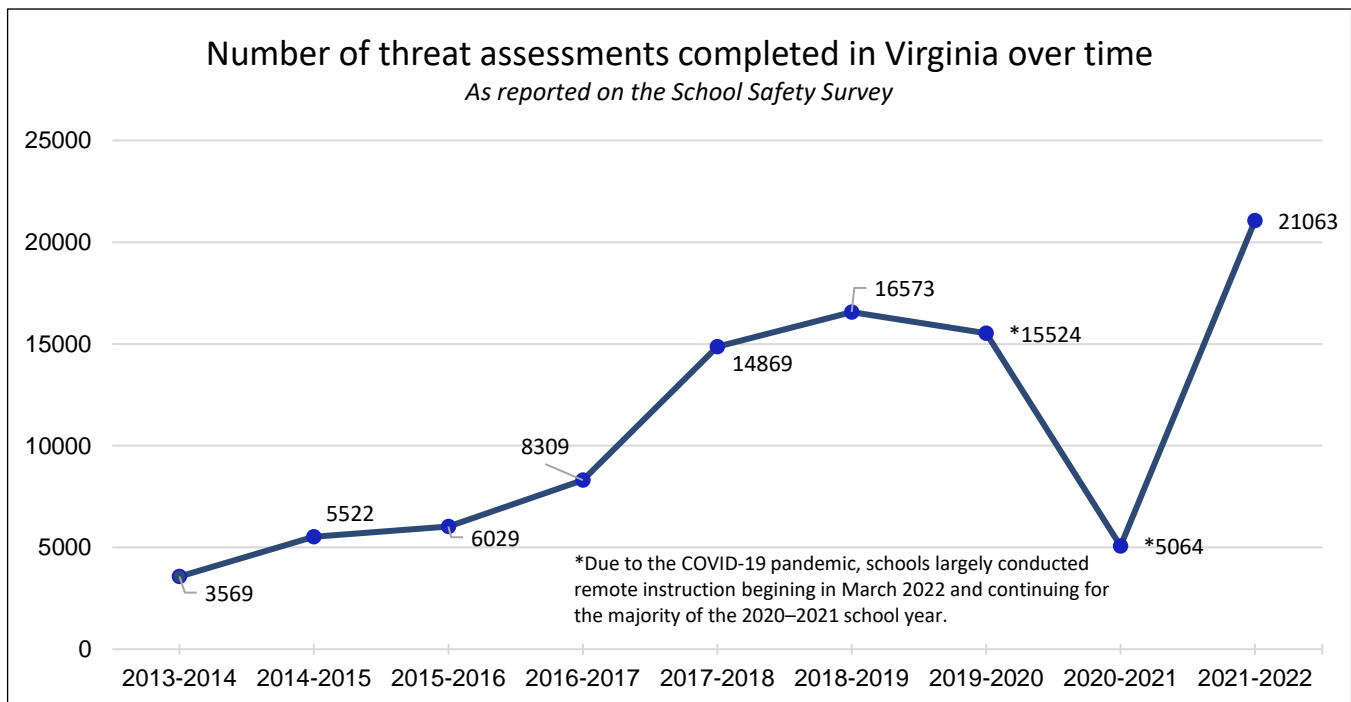
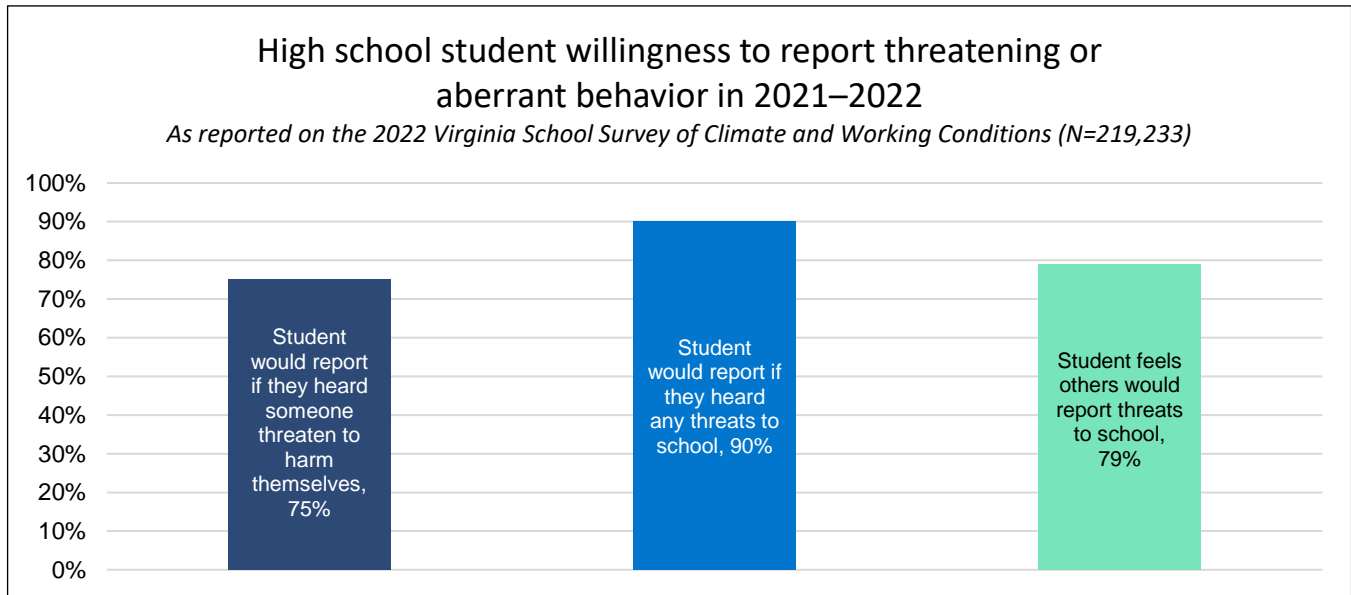
(N=132)



THREAT ASSESSMENT

In 2013, the Virginia General Assembly enacted the *Code of Virginia* § 22.1-79.4, requiring all public school divisions to establish and operate threat assessment teams in support of their schools. This legislation also directs the DCJS Virginia Center for School and Campus Safety (VCSCS) to study the application and implementation of threat assessment in public schools.

While 99% of school administrators reported they had informed students on how to recognize and report threatening or aberrant behavior, only 39% of high school students reported being aware that their school utilizes a team approach to respond to threats of violence from students or other individuals.



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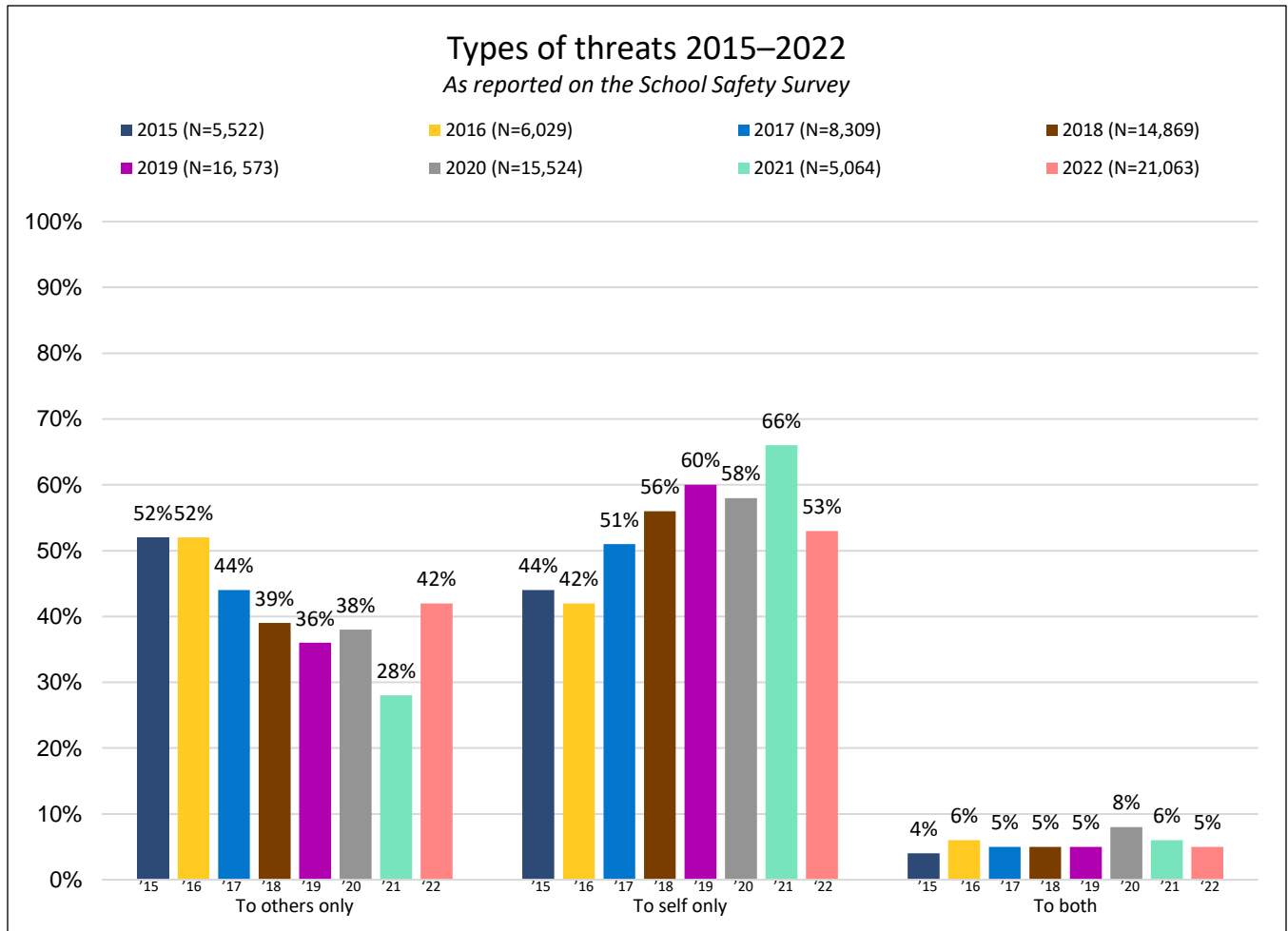
The following definitions were utilized to determine the type of threat:

Threatened others only: threatened harm, posed harm to, or was perceived as posing harm to someone other than self, BUT DID NOT threaten suicide or self-harm

Threatened other(s) and self (to both): threatened harm, posed harm to, or was perceived as posing harm to someone other than self AND threatened suicide or self-harm, or was perceived as suicidal or posing harm to self

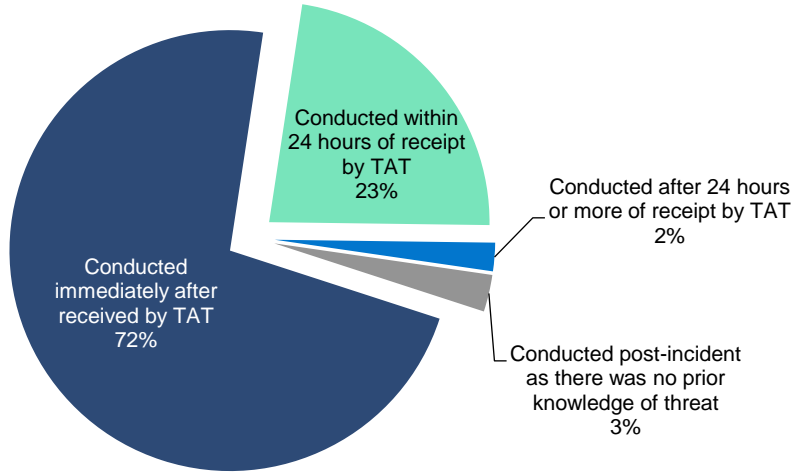
Threatened self only: threatened suicide or self-harm, or was perceived as suicidal or posing harm to self BUT DID NOT threaten others nor were they perceived as a threat to others

Almost all schools (92%; 1,682) reported that the threat assessment team handles threats of self-harm. In the remaining 8% (140 schools), counselors, administrators, school psychologists, social workers, or school nurses handle these types of threats.



Timeline of threat assessments conducted once the threat was received by the threat assessment team (TAT)

As reported on the 2022 School Safety Survey (N=21,063)



Starting in the 2020–2021 school year, VCSCS updated ratings of priority levels for threat assessments in order to bring model policies in line with best practices in the field. This updated prioritization system for rating threat assessments creates a more holistic approach in examining the impact of the threat on the school community and not just the risk the subject poses in carrying out the threat. This new system takes into account the **STEP**[®] model³, which considers the **S**ubject(s), **T**arget(s), **E**nvironment, and **P**recipitating events and the overall level of concern associated with a case.

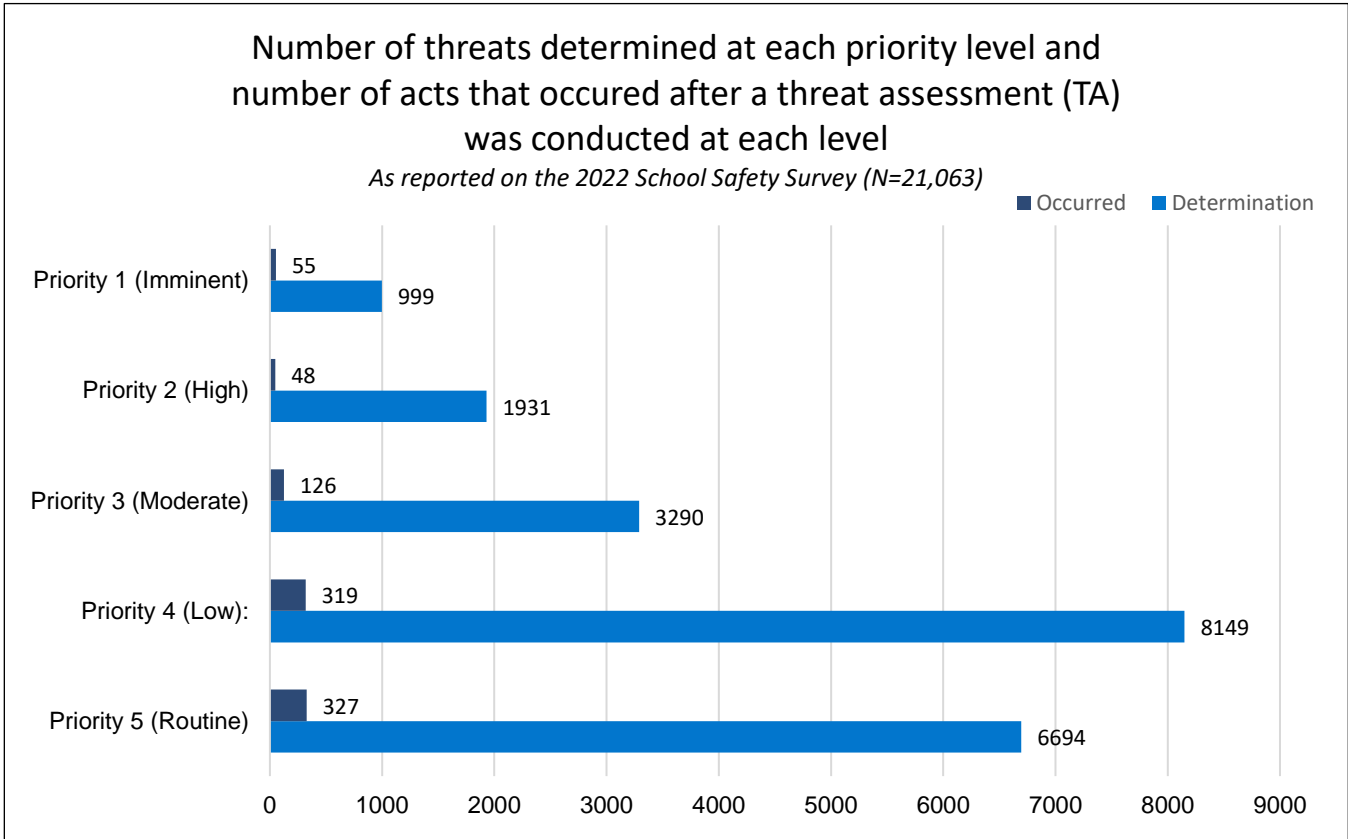
The correlation between the new and previous threat ratings:

New Priority Level/Classification System	Old Classification System
<p>Priority 1 (Critical/Imminent): Subject poses an imminent threat of serious violence or harm to self or others and has or may reasonably have significant impact on others. Requires immediate law enforcement and school administration notification, subject containment, target protection and safety planning, implementation of crisis response and notification protocols, ongoing assessment and management plan, and active monitoring.</p>	<p>Imminent: Subject/situation appears to pose a significant and immediate threat of serious violence toward others that requires containment and action to protect identified target(s).</p>
<p>Priority 2 (High): Subject poses, or is rapidly developing capability for, a threat of serious violence or harm to self or others; or is in urgent need of hospitalization or treatment. Targets/others are impacted. Typically involves environmental/systemic factors and consideration for precipitating events.</p> <p>Requires immediate notification of school administration and law enforcement, subject containment, target protection and safety plan, activation of crisis response protocols as appropriate, ongoing assessment and management plan, and active monitoring. Referrals as appropriate.</p>	<p>High Risk: Subject/situation appears to pose a threat, exhibiting behaviors that indicate a continuing intent to harm and efforts to prepare to carry out the plan; and may also exhibit other concerning behavior that require intervention.</p>

³ Deisinger, E.R.D. & Nolan, J.J. (2020). Threat assessment and management in higher education: Enhancing the standard of practice. In Meloy & J. Hoffmann (Eds.). International handbook of threat assessment: 2nd Edition. New York: Oxford.

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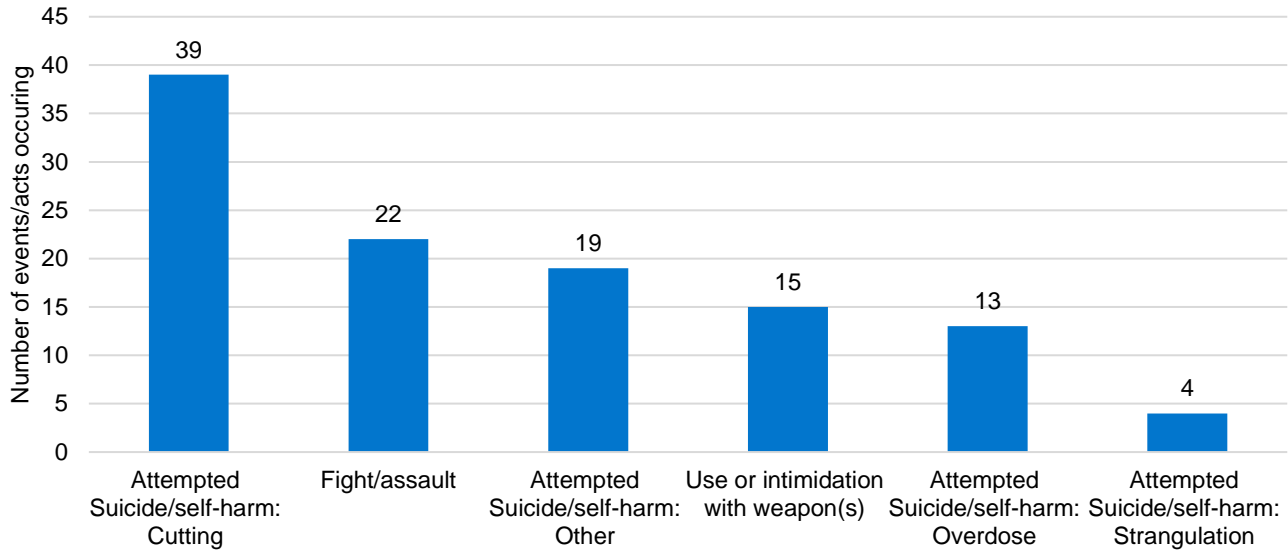
New Priority Level/Classification System	Old Classification System
<p>Priority 3 (Moderate): Subject does not pose a threat of serious violence or harm though risk cannot be ruled-out. Subject may be developing capability for harm and is engaging in aberrant or concerning behaviors that indicate need for assistance/intervention. Targets/others likely concerned and impacted.</p> <p>Environmental/systemic or precipitating factors may be present. Consider law enforcement/security notification as appropriate. Requires ongoing assessment and management plan, and active monitoring. Referrals as appropriate.</p>	<p>Moderate Risk: Subject/situation does not appear to pose a threat but exhibits behaviors that indicate a continuing intent or potential for future violence; and/or exhibits other concerning behavior that requires intervention.</p>
<p>Priority 4 (Low): Subject does not indicate a threat of violence or harm to self or others; would or may benefit from intervention or assistance with concerns. Target, environmental/systemic, or precipitating events may be present at low levels. May involve some ongoing assessment management with passive monitoring and/or periodic active monitoring, Referrals as appropriate; close case if no team interventions or monitoring indicated.</p>	<p>Low Risk: Subject/situation does not appear to pose a threat and any exhibited issues/concerns can be resolved easily.</p>
<p>Priority 5 (Routine/No Known Concerns): Subject does not indicate a threat of violence or harm to self or others; or need for assistance or intervention at the time of assessment. No impact on others, environmental factors, or precipitants that need team intervention. Close case.</p>	<p>No Previous Classification</p>



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Actual act occurring in the Priority 1 & 2 (imminent & high) cases where the threat assessment was conducted prior to the event occurring in 2021-2022

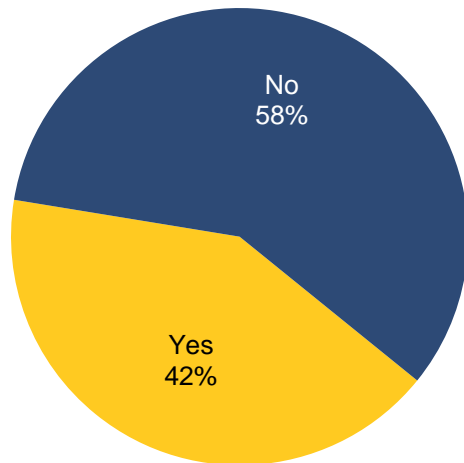
As reported on the 2022 School Safety Survey (N=154)



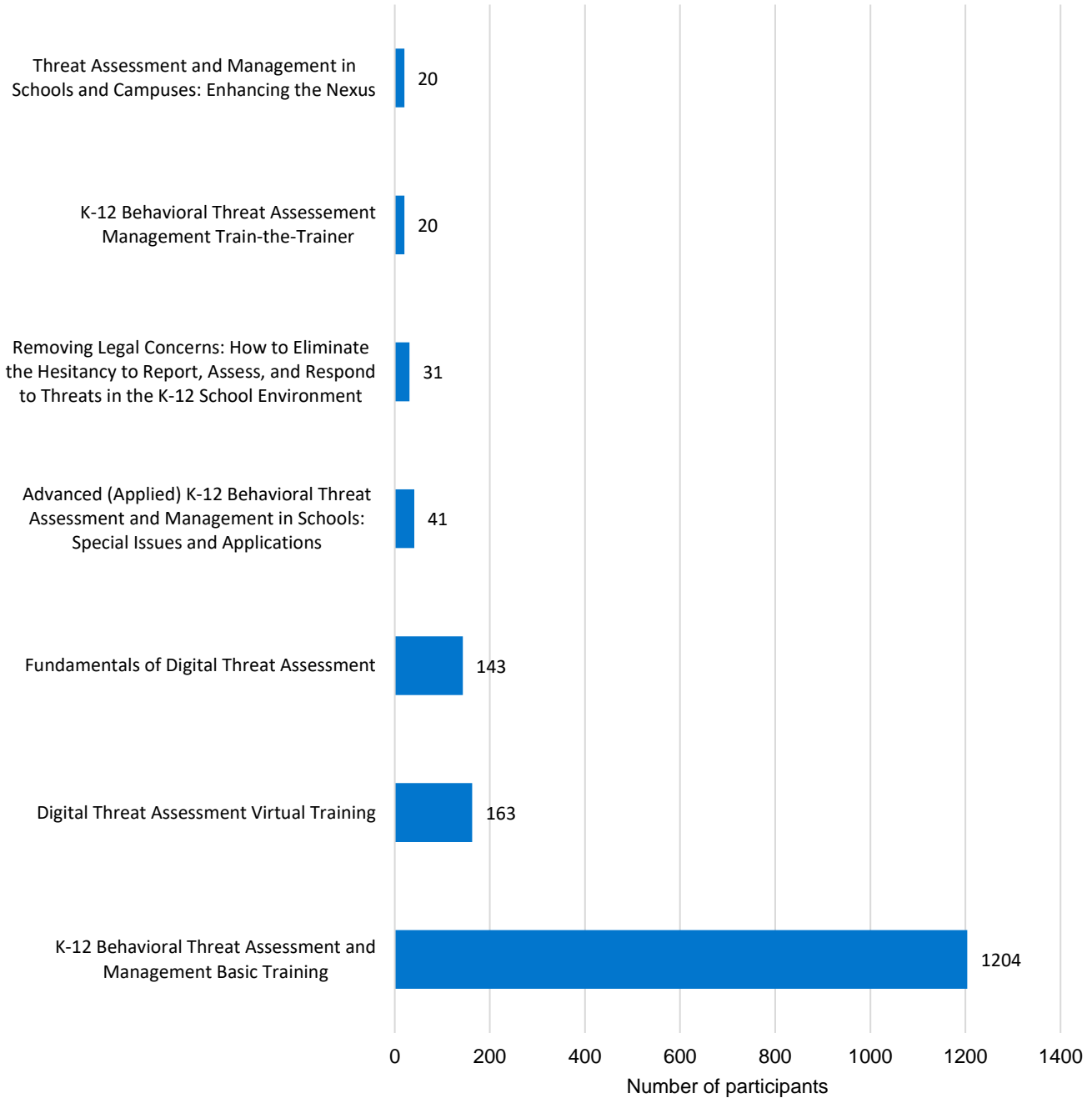
There were 615 threats classified as Priority 1 or 2 (imminent or high) where an act ultimately occurred. VCSCS asked schools reporting these events to provide additional information. For 75% (461) of these threats, there was no reporting of the event prior to its occurrence, therefore the threat assessment was conducted after the event occurred in order to debrief the event and avert further events. There were no reports of a student death by suicide in 2021–2022.

Did the actual act occurring take place on school grounds or at a school-sponsored event?

As reported on the 2022 School Safety Survey (N=103)



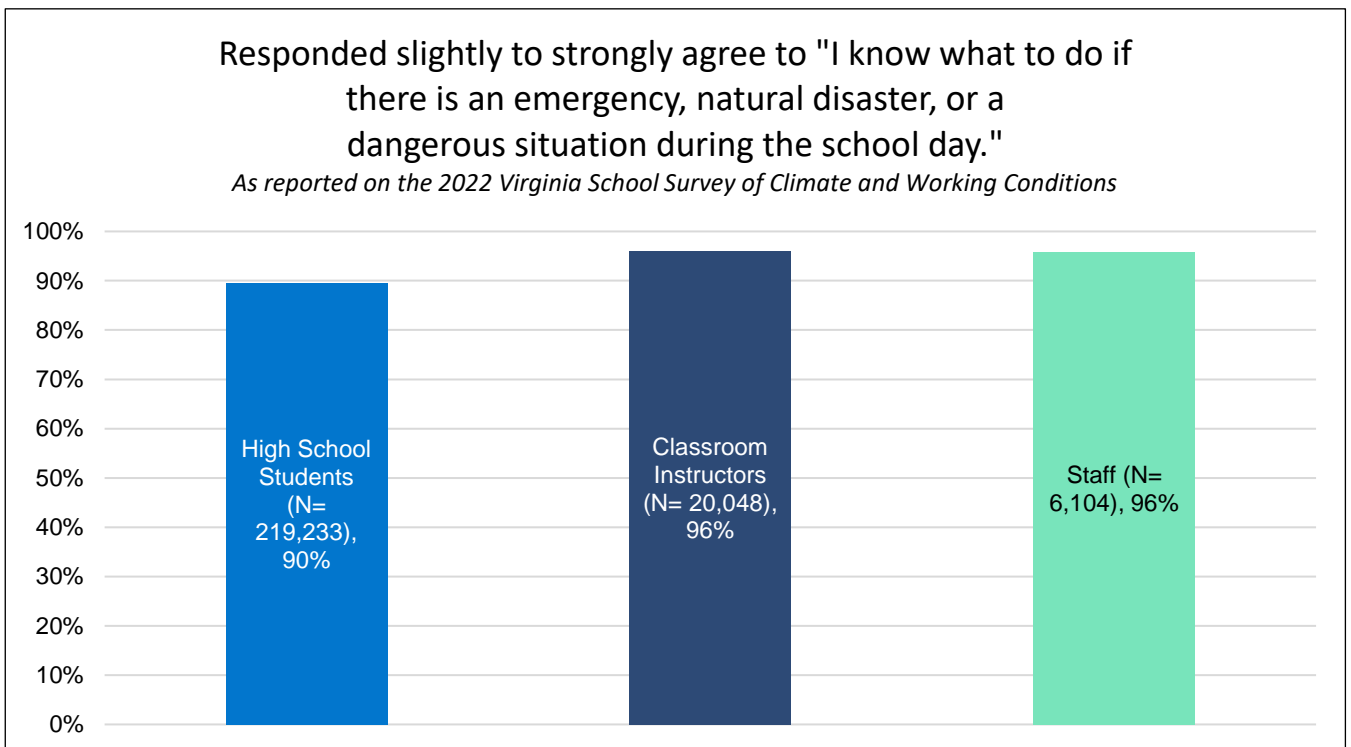
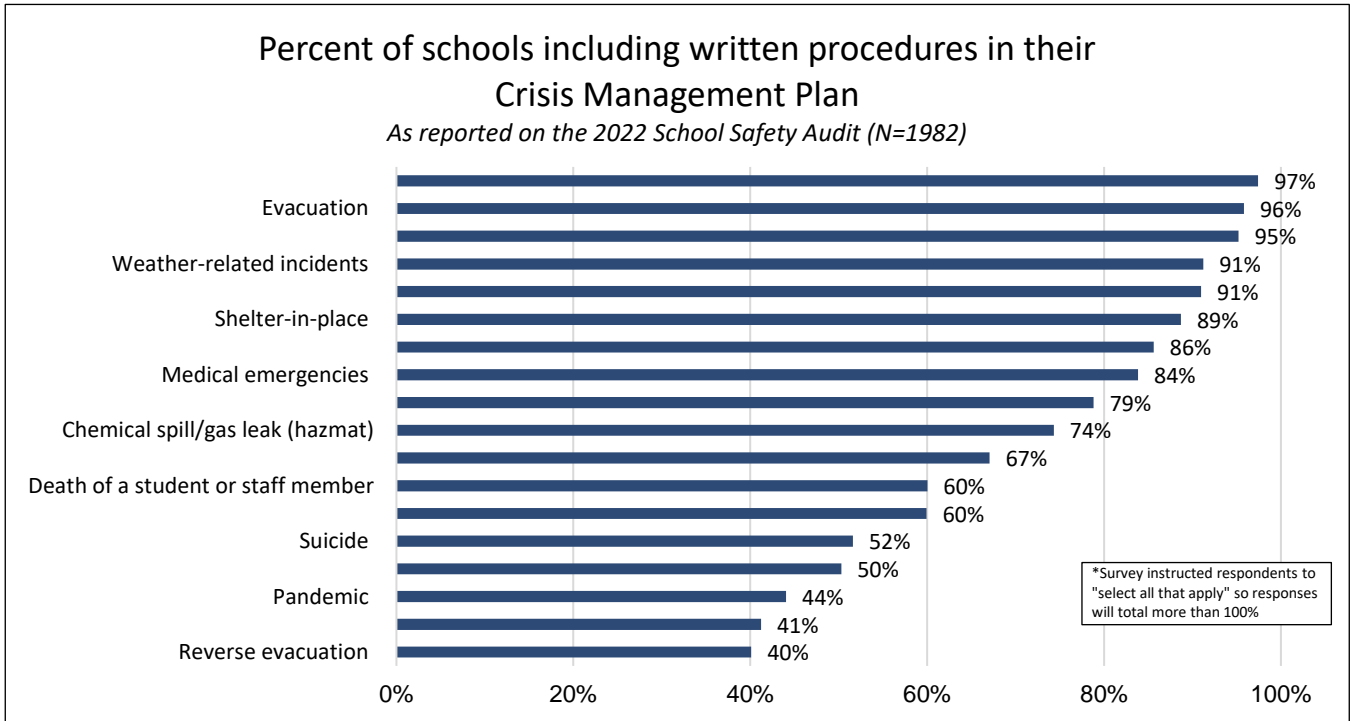
Number of participants trained by DCJS in Threat Assessment during the 2021–2022 school year



SAFETY AND CRISIS

Since the creation of the Virginia Center for School and Campus Safety (VCSCS) in 2000, VCSCS has focused on improving and enhancing safety by addressing topics that affect Virginia schools. The safety and security of school communities encompasses personnel, crisis management, school climate, and physical measures that constitute a school's ability to mitigate, prepare for, and respond to a crisis.

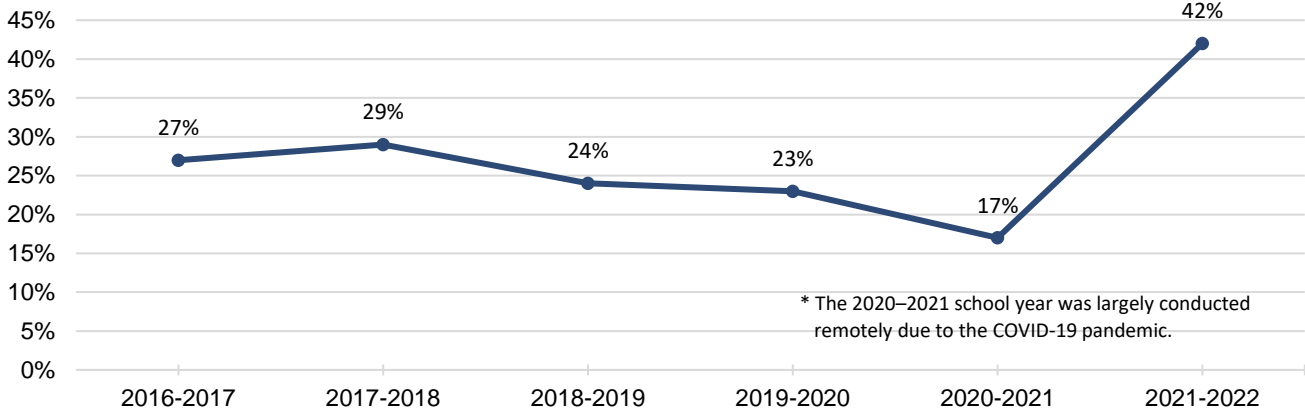
Crisis Management Plans



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Percent of schools activating their Crisis Management Plan during the school years from 2016–2022

As reported on the Virginia School Safety Survey



Reasons schools activated their Crisis Management Plans during the 2021-2022 school year

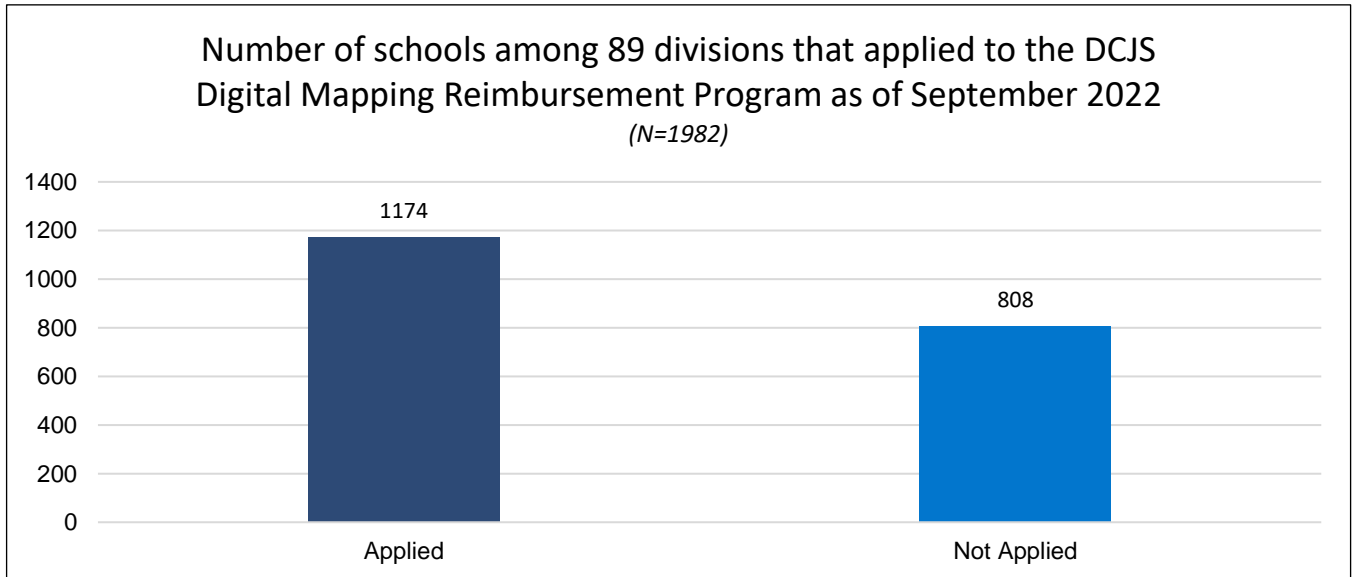
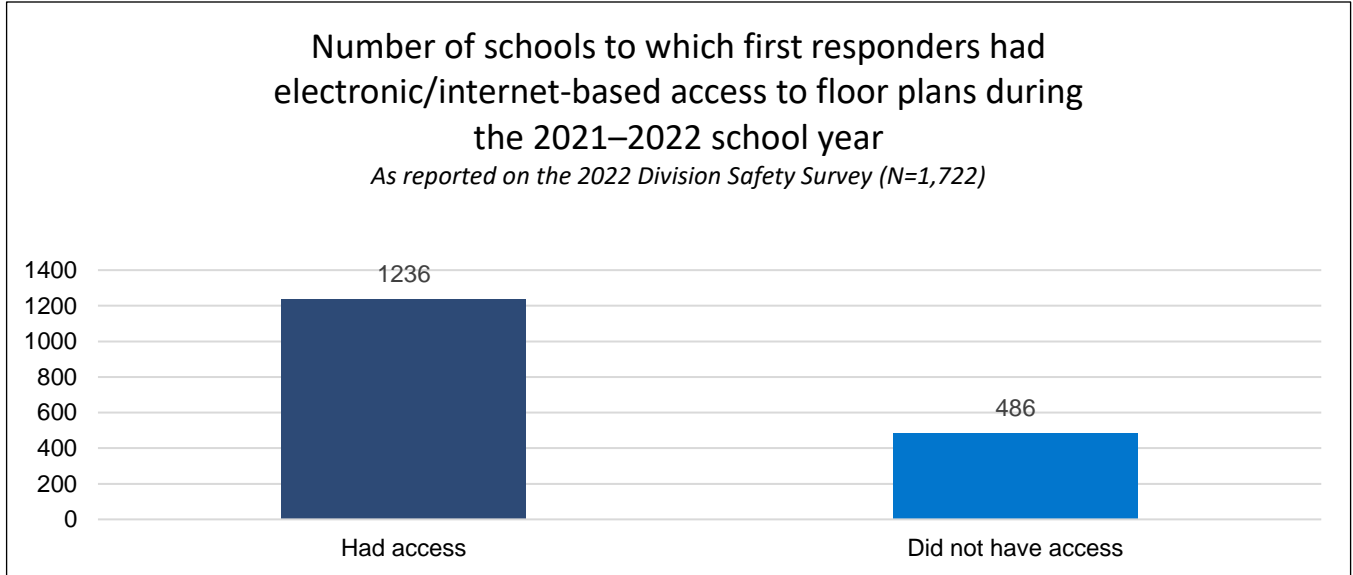
As reported on the 2022 School Safety Survey (N=817)



*Survey instructed respondents to "select all that apply" so responses will total more than 100%

2022 VIRGINIA SCHOOL SAFETY AUDIT HIGHLIGHTS

Paper and one-dimensional digital maps are obsolete for today’s school emergencies. When law enforcement and other emergency first responders arrive on scene at a school to respond to an active attacker, a fire, or medical emergency, seconds count. The Digital Mapping Program for Virginia K-12 Schools offers funding to school divisions in order to assist with producing accurate floor plans, high-resolution imagery, emergency response pre-planning, and gridded-overlay combined into a map for each of their schools. Funding is available to school divisions in an amount not to exceed \$3,500 multiplied by the number of schools in the division that are mapped. Approval for applicants began on a rolling basis in April 2022.

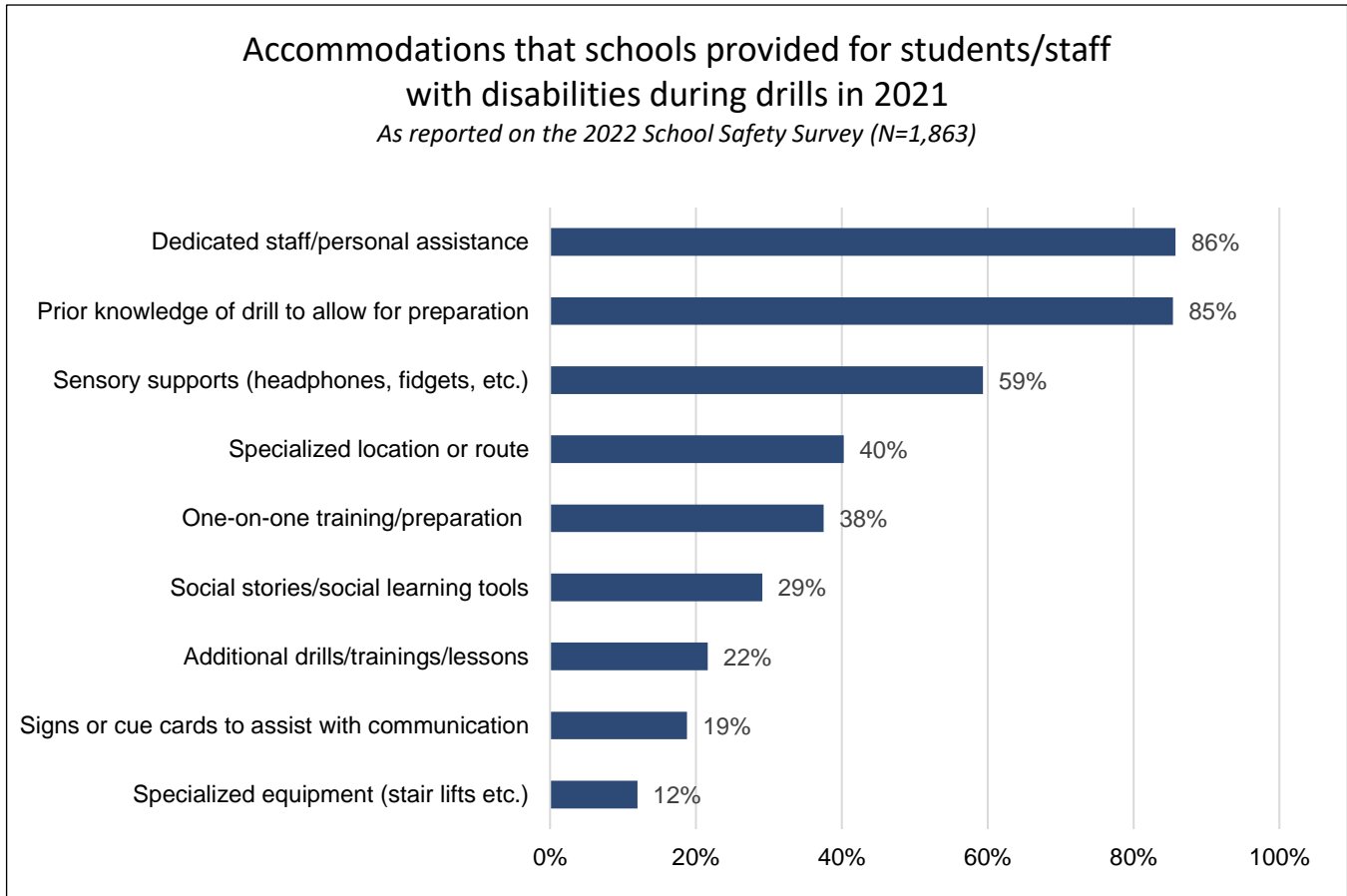


Among the 89 Virginia Public School Divisions that have completed the digital mapping application, 1,174 schools are eligible to move forward with the Digital Mapping Reimbursement Program.

Emergency Drills

According to the *Code of Virginia § 22.1-137.2*, the Board of Education’s Regulations Establishing Standards for Accrediting Public Schools in Virginia (SOA) ([8 VAC 20-131-260](#)), and the [Virginia Statewide Fire Prevention Code \(SFPC\)](#), all Virginia schools must conduct the following emergency drills each year:

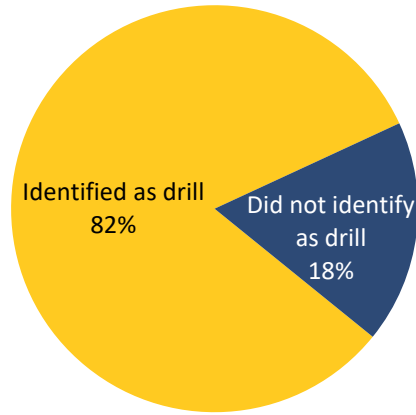
- An initial fire drill within the first 10 days of the school year
- A second fire drill within the first 20 days of the school year
- At least one fire drill per month for the remainder of the school year
- A lockdown drill at least twice within the first 20 days of the school year
- A third lockdown drill after the first 60 days of the school year



Lockdown is defined by [REMS](#) (Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools) as a course of action to secure school buildings and grounds during incidents that pose an immediate threat of violence in or around the school. The primary objective of a lockdown is to quickly ensure all school staff, students, and visitors are secured in the rooms away from immediate danger.

Percent of schools identifying lockdowns as drills when implementing unannounced lockdowns

As reported on the 2022 School Safety Survey (N=959)



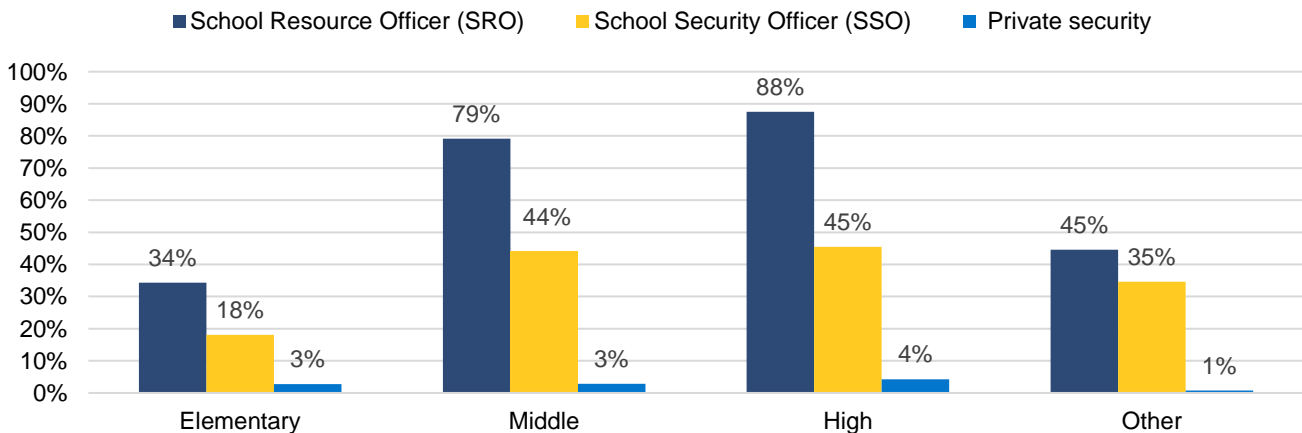
Security Personnel

A School Resource Officer (SRO) is defined in the Code of Virginia § 9.1-101 as “...a certified law enforcement officer hired by the local law enforcement agency to provide law enforcement and security services to Virginia public elementary and secondary schools.”

A School Security Officer (SSO) is defined in § 9.1-101 as “... an individual who is employed by the local school board or a private or religious school for the singular purpose of maintaining order and discipline, preventing crime, investigating violations of the policies of the school board or the private or religious school, and detaining students violating the law or the policies of the school board or the private or religious school on school property, school buses, or at school-sponsored events and who is responsible solely for ensuring the safety, security, and welfare of all students, faculty, staff, and visitors in the assigned school.”

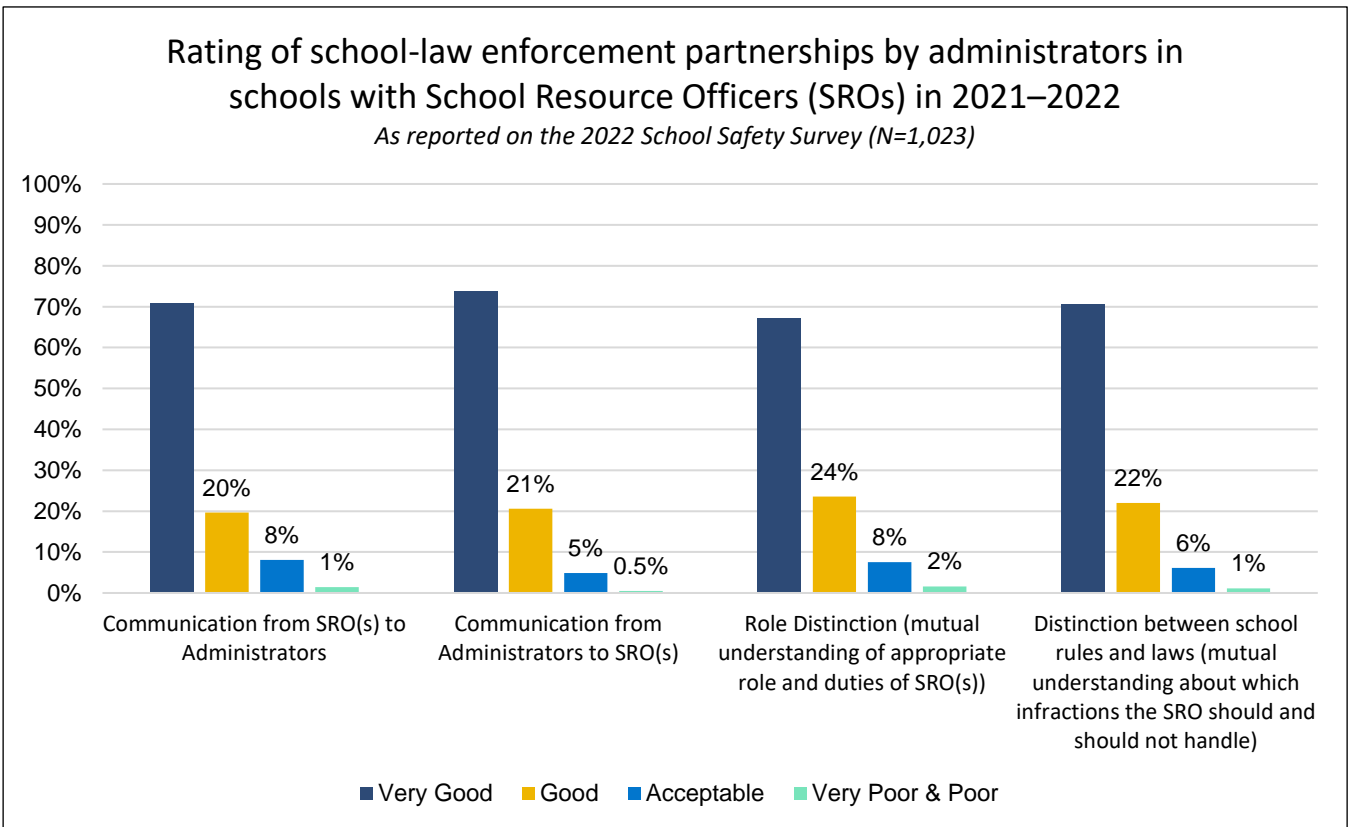
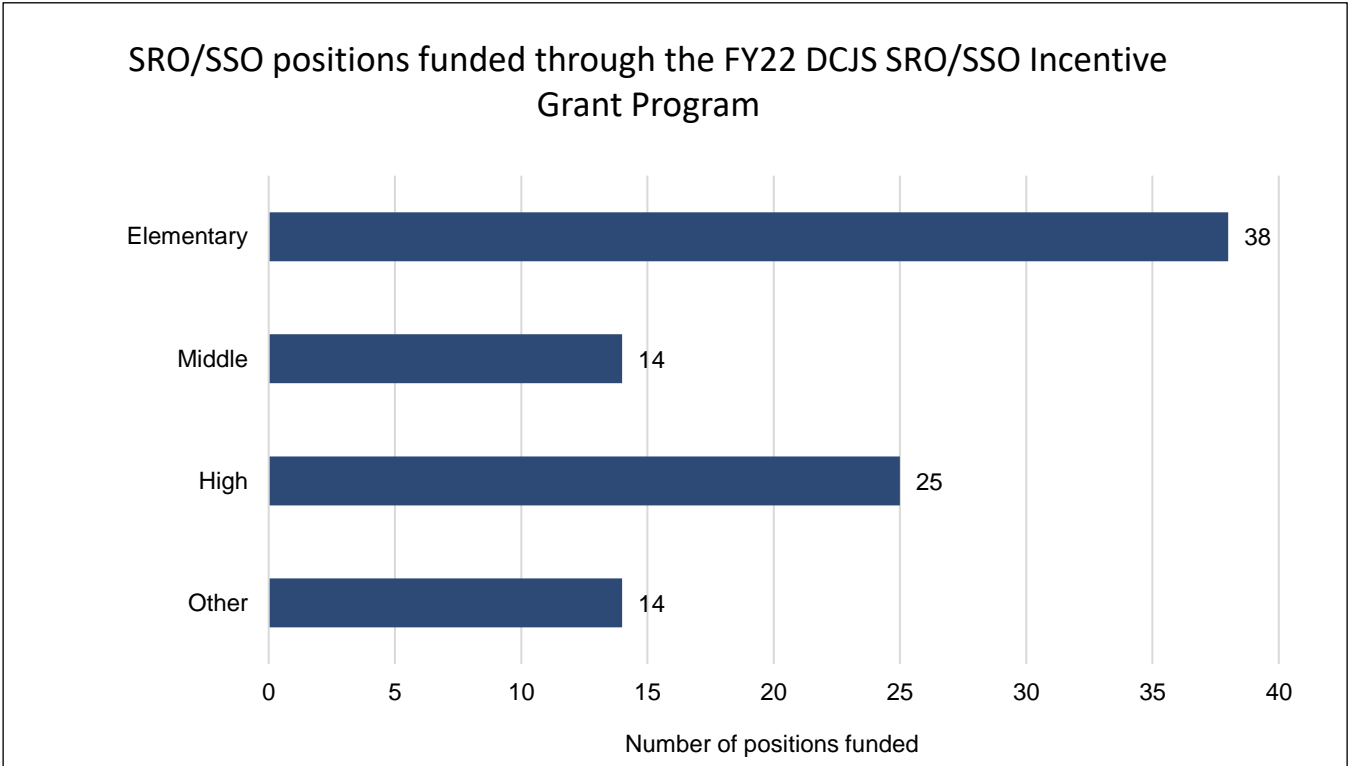
Percent of schools with security personnel (full or part-time) in 2021–2022 by school level

As reported on the 2022 School Safety Survey (Elem N=1,184; Mid N=316, High N=352, Other N=130)



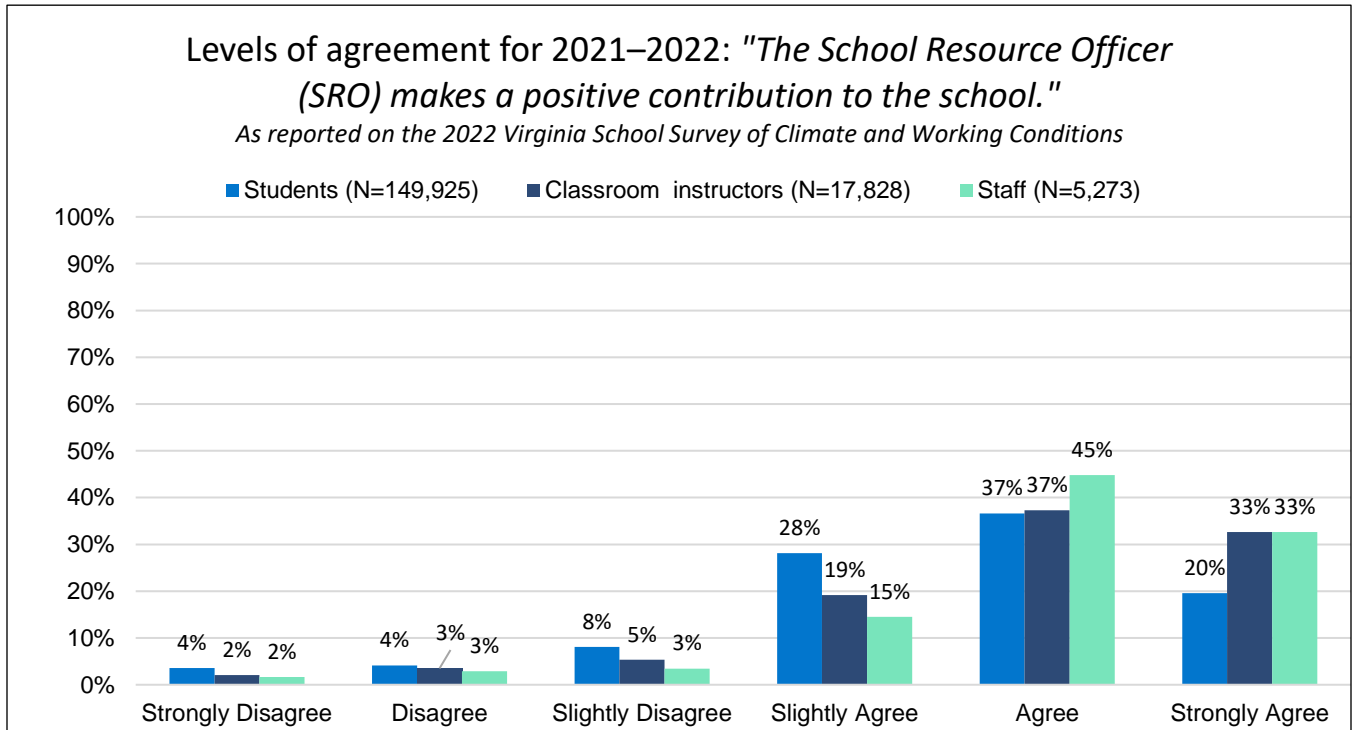
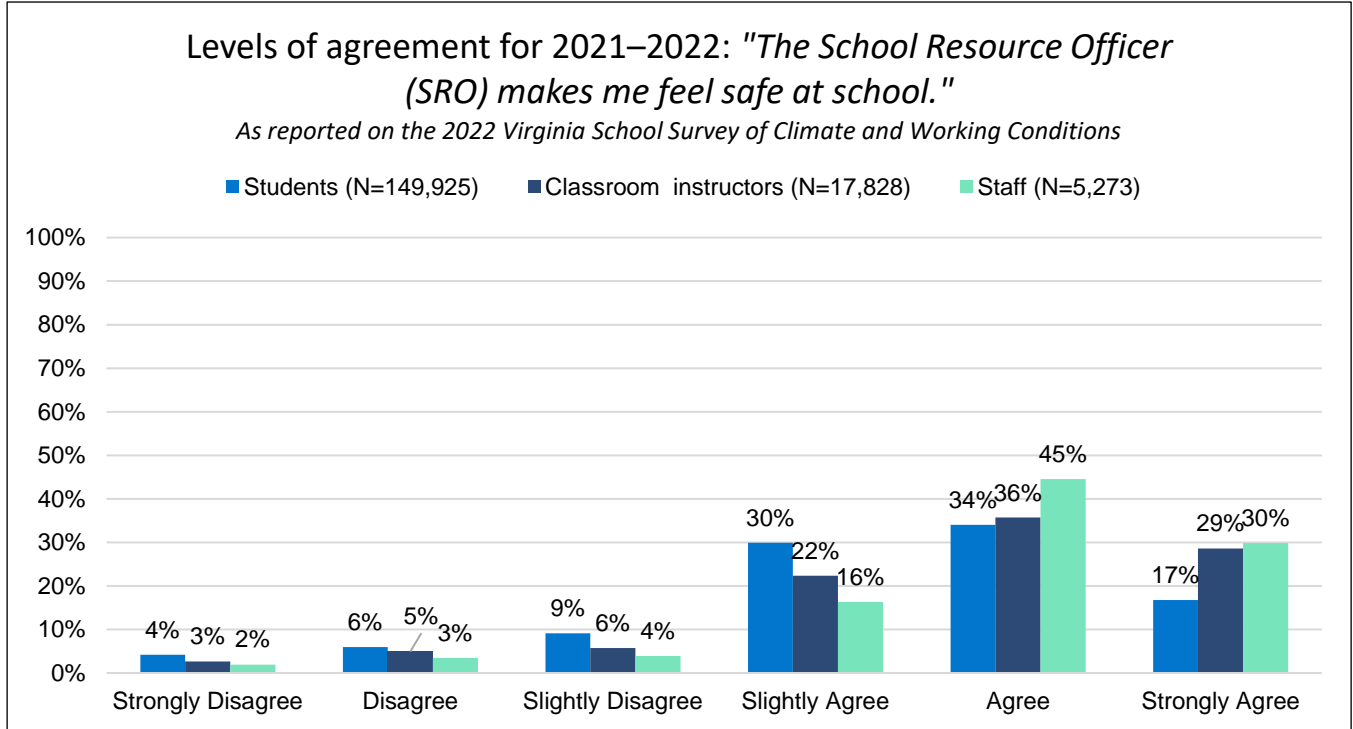
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Through the FY22 DCJS SRO/SSO Incentive Grant Program; which provided funding to localities to place either a School Resource Officer or School Security Officer in elementary and secondary schools where none previously existed; a total of 81 School Resource Officer and 13 School Security Officer positions were funded. This funding was made possible through \$3,852,977 State Special Funds and a local match of \$1,727,260 for a total of \$5,580,237.



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The 2022 Virginia School Survey of Climate and Working Conditions asked high school students, classroom instructors, and staff about their perceptions of the School Resource Officer (SRO). These SRO perception questions were only presented to the 68% (149,925) of students, 89% (17,828) of classroom instructors, and 88% (5,273) of staff who responded that they had an SRO in their building. Over 80% of each respondent group agreed or strongly agreed that the SRO made them feel safe and made a positive contribution to the school.

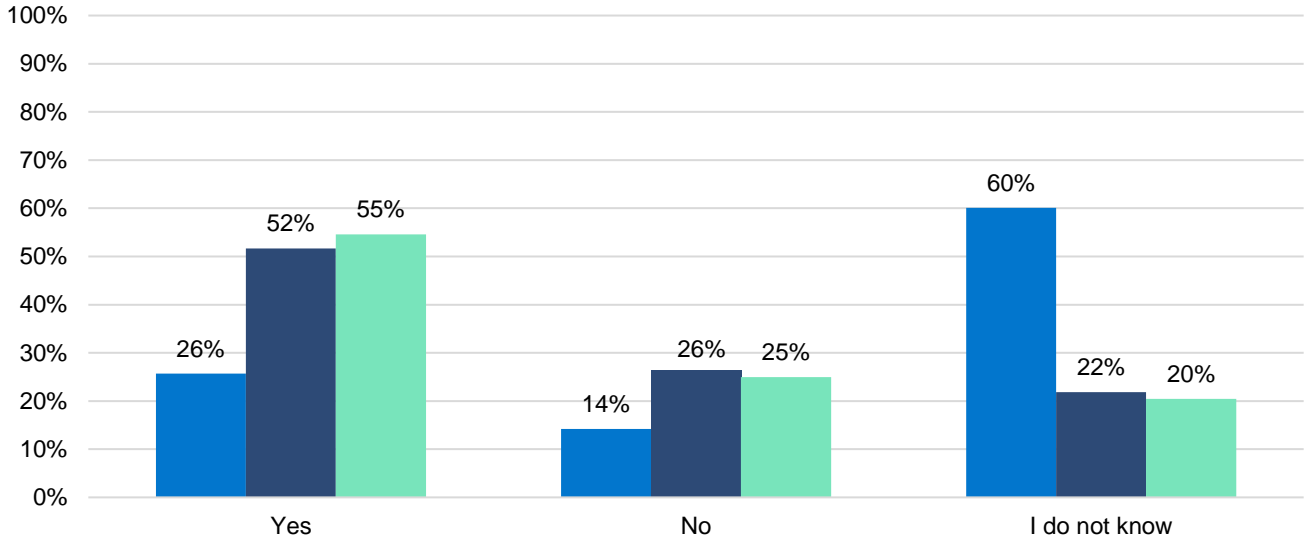


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Responses from individuals that reported they did not have an SRO in their building to: "Would you feel safer if your school had an SRO?"

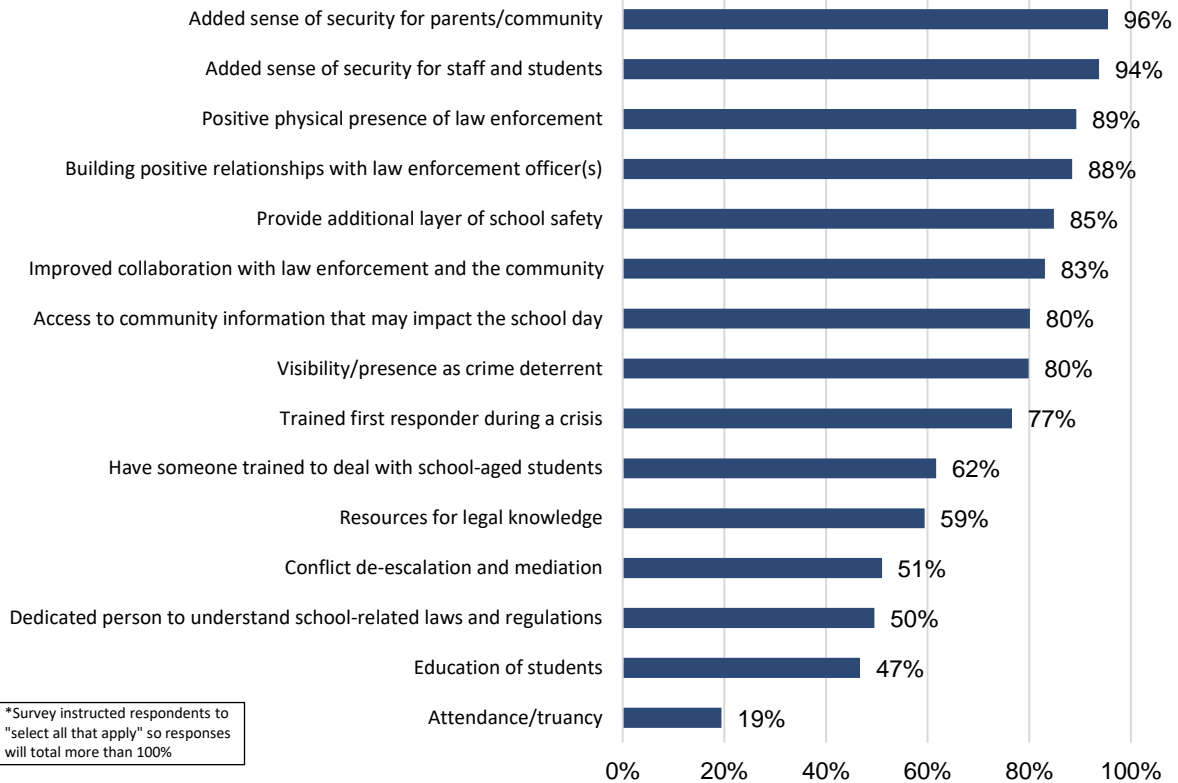
As reported on the 2022 Virginia School Survey of Climate and Working Conditions

■ Students (N=68,848) ■ Classroom instructors (N=2,213) ■ Staff (N=709)



Benefits of having a School Resource Officer (SRO) as reported by schools with SROs in 2021–2022

As reported on the 2022 School Safety Survey (N=1,023)

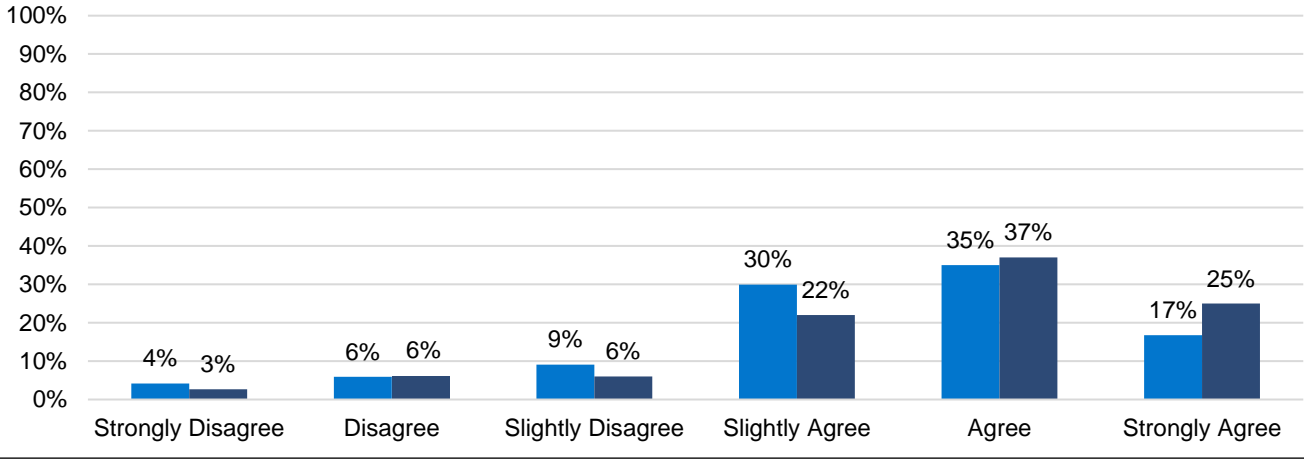


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Levels of agreement for 2021–2022: *"The School Security Officer (SSO) makes me feel safe at school."*

As reported on the 2022 Virginia School Survey of Climate and Working Conditions

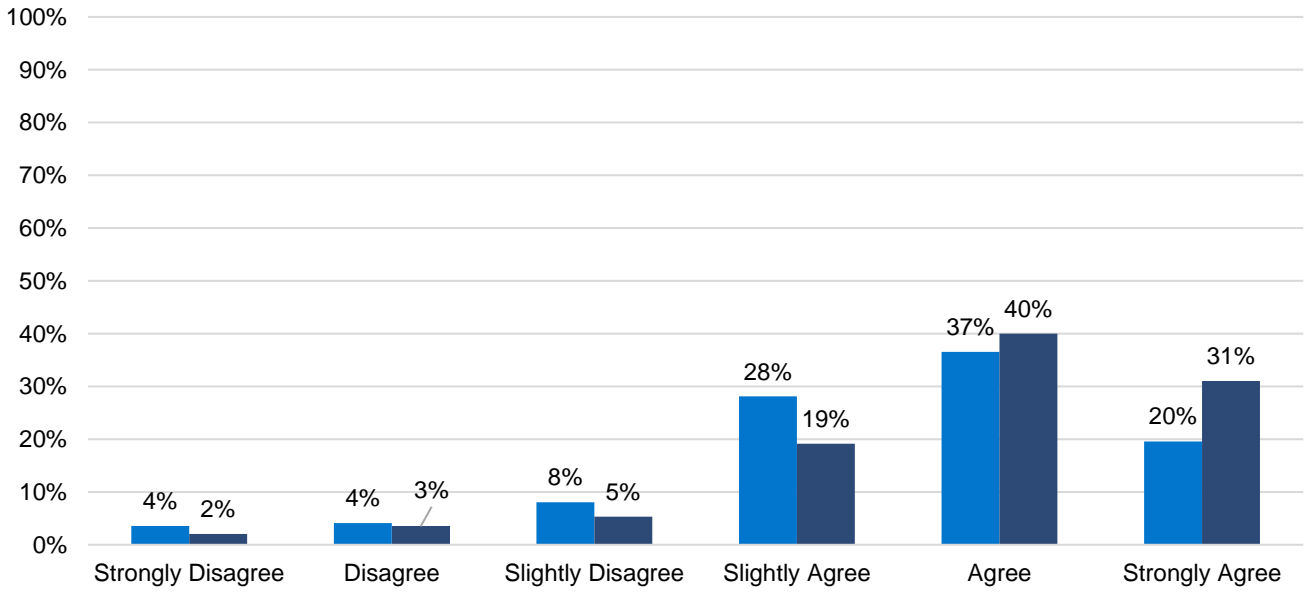
■ Students (N=121,871) ■ Classroom instructors (N=17,828)



Levels of agreement for 2021–2022: *"The School Security Officer(s) makes a positive contribution to the school."*

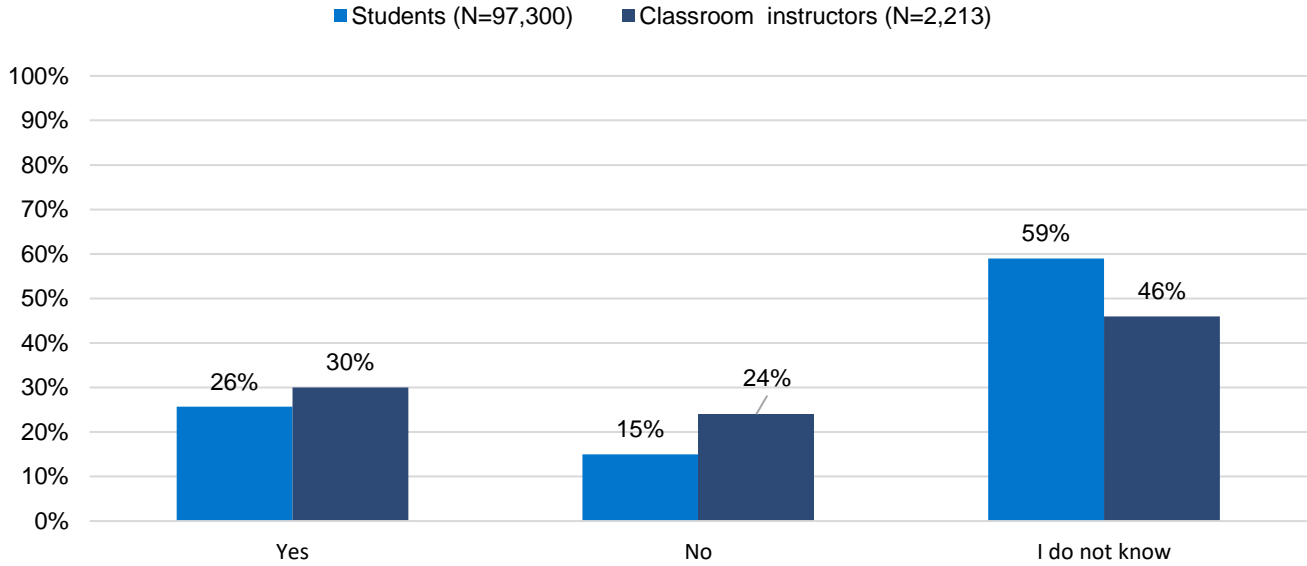
As reported on the 2022 Virginia School Survey of Climate and Working Conditions

■ Students (N=121,871) ■ Classroom instructors (N=17,828)

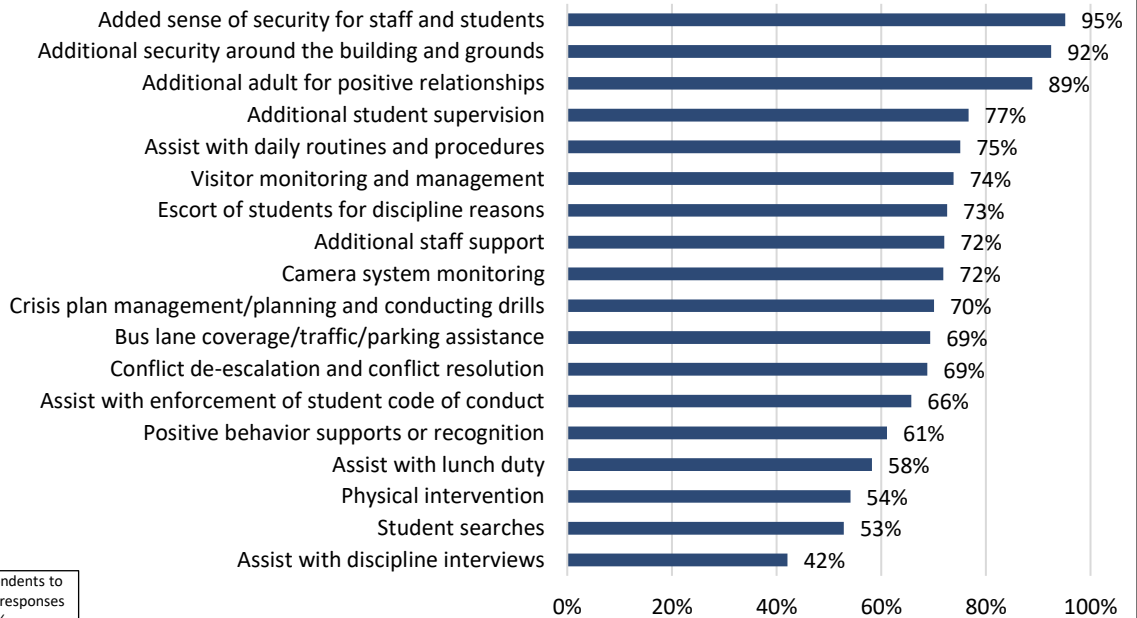


2022 VIRGINIA SCHOOL SAFETY AUDIT HIGHLIGHTS

Responses from individuals that reported they did not have an SSO in their building to: *"Would you feel safer if your school had an SSO?"*
 As reported on the 2022 Virginia School Survey of Climate and Working Conditions



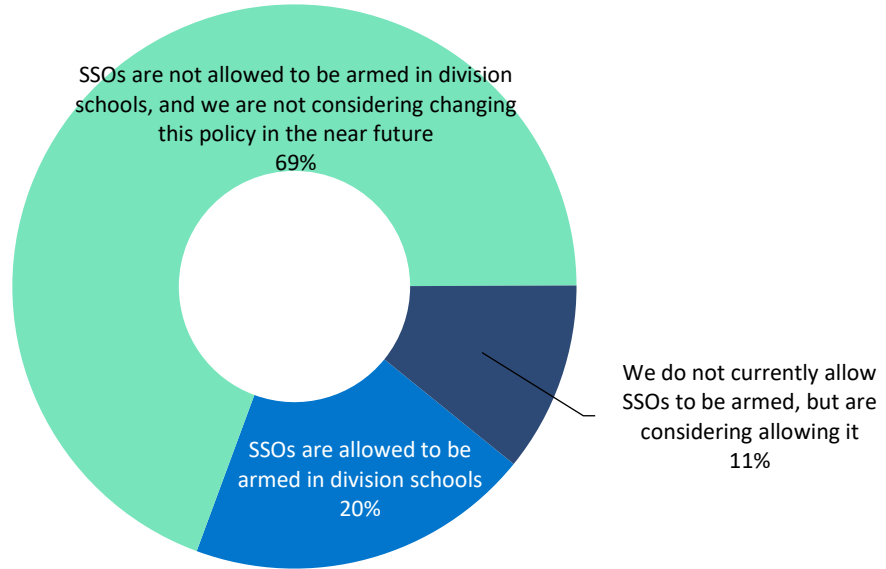
Benefits to having a School Security Officer (SSO) as reported by schools with SSOs in 2021–2022
 As reported on the 2022 School Safety Survey (N=558)



*Survey instructed respondents to "select all that apply" so responses will total more than 100%

Divisions' policy on arming School Security Officers (SSO)

As reported on the 2022 Division Safety Survey (N=46)

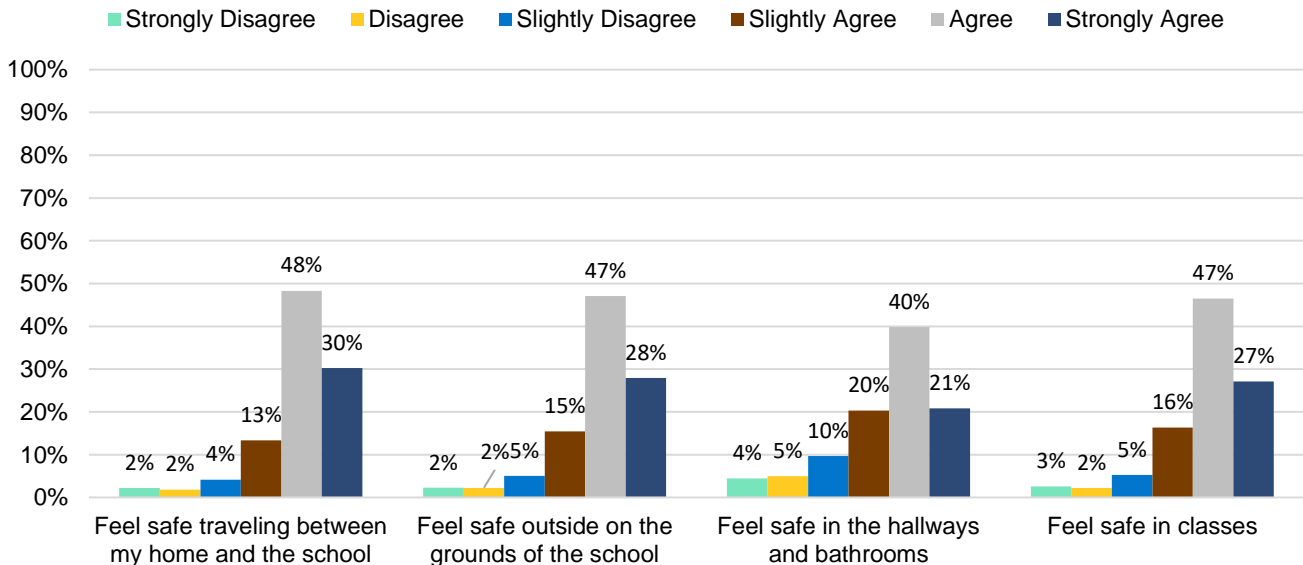


School Climate

The Virginia School Survey of Climate and Working Conditions is intended to provide information on school climate, safety, and working conditions in order to maintain a safe and orderly school environment conducive to learning. The survey measures student, teacher, and staff perceptions of school rules and discipline, teacher-student relationships, student engagement in school, and the extent of bullying and teasing at school.

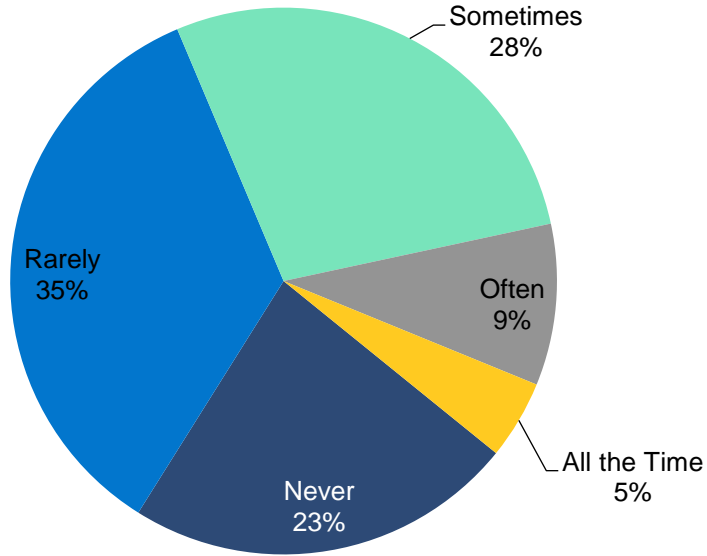
High school students' perception of safety in and around their school

As reported on the 2022 Virginia School Survey of Climate and Working Conditions (N=217,530)

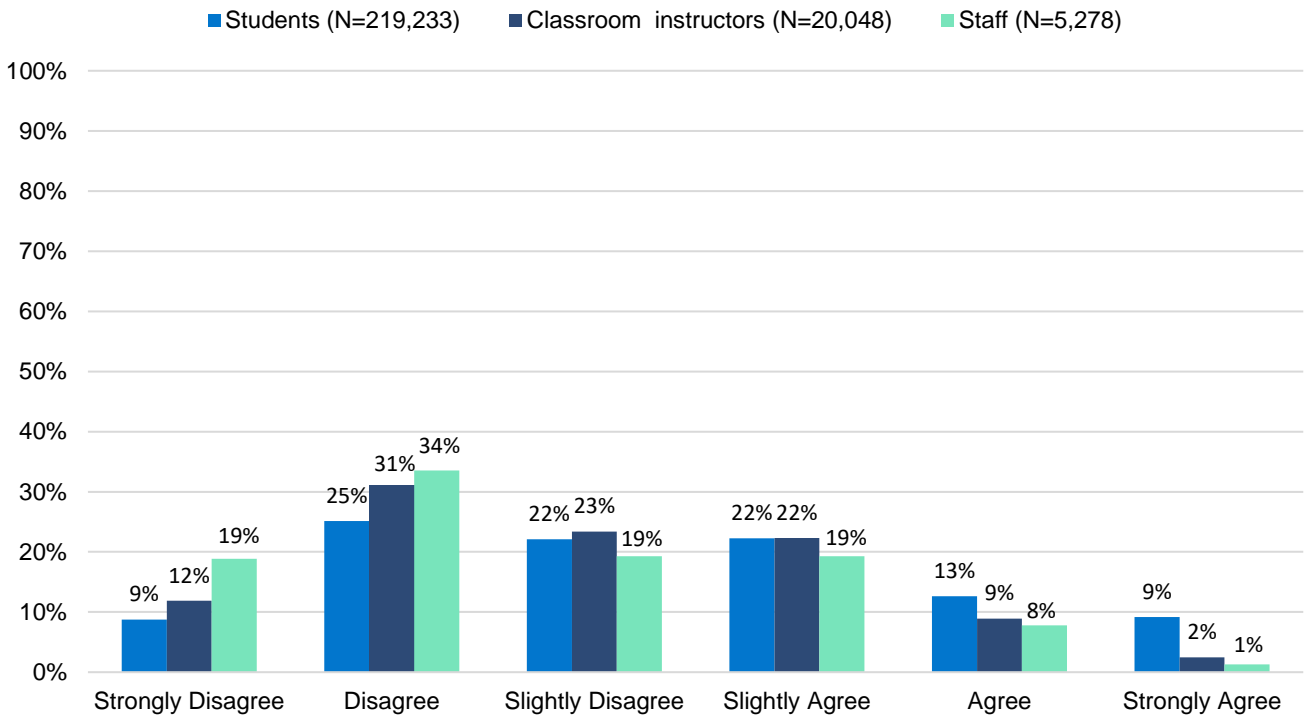


2022 VIRGINIA SCHOOL SAFETY AUDIT HIGHLIGHTS

How often high school students worry about violence at their school
 As reported on the 2022 Virginia School Survey of Climate and Working Conditions (N=217,530)



Levels of agreement to "Bullying is a problem at this school"
 As reported on the 2022 Virginia School Survey of Climate and Working Conditions

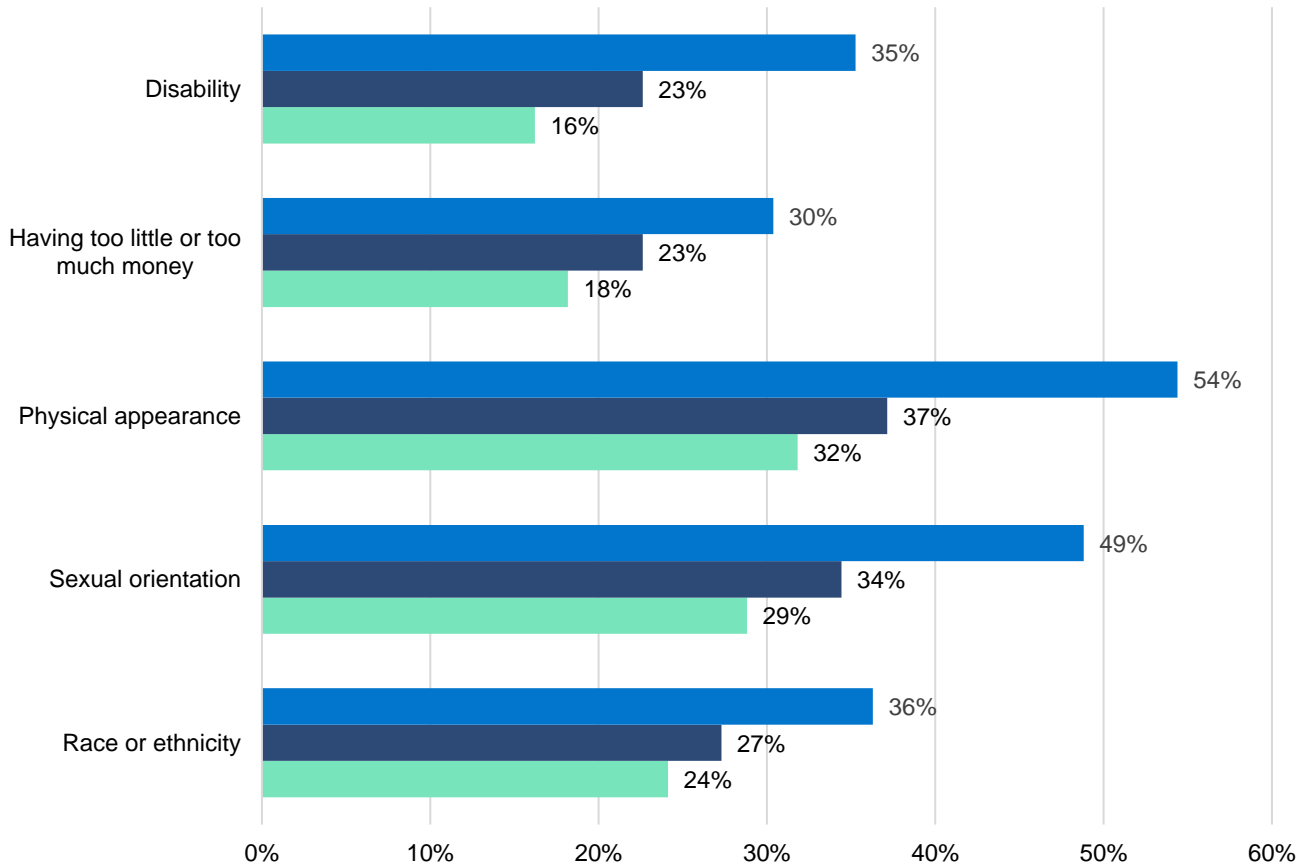


2022 VIRGINIA SCHOOL SAFETY AUDIT HIGHLIGHTS

Perceptions of why students were bullied in 2021–2022

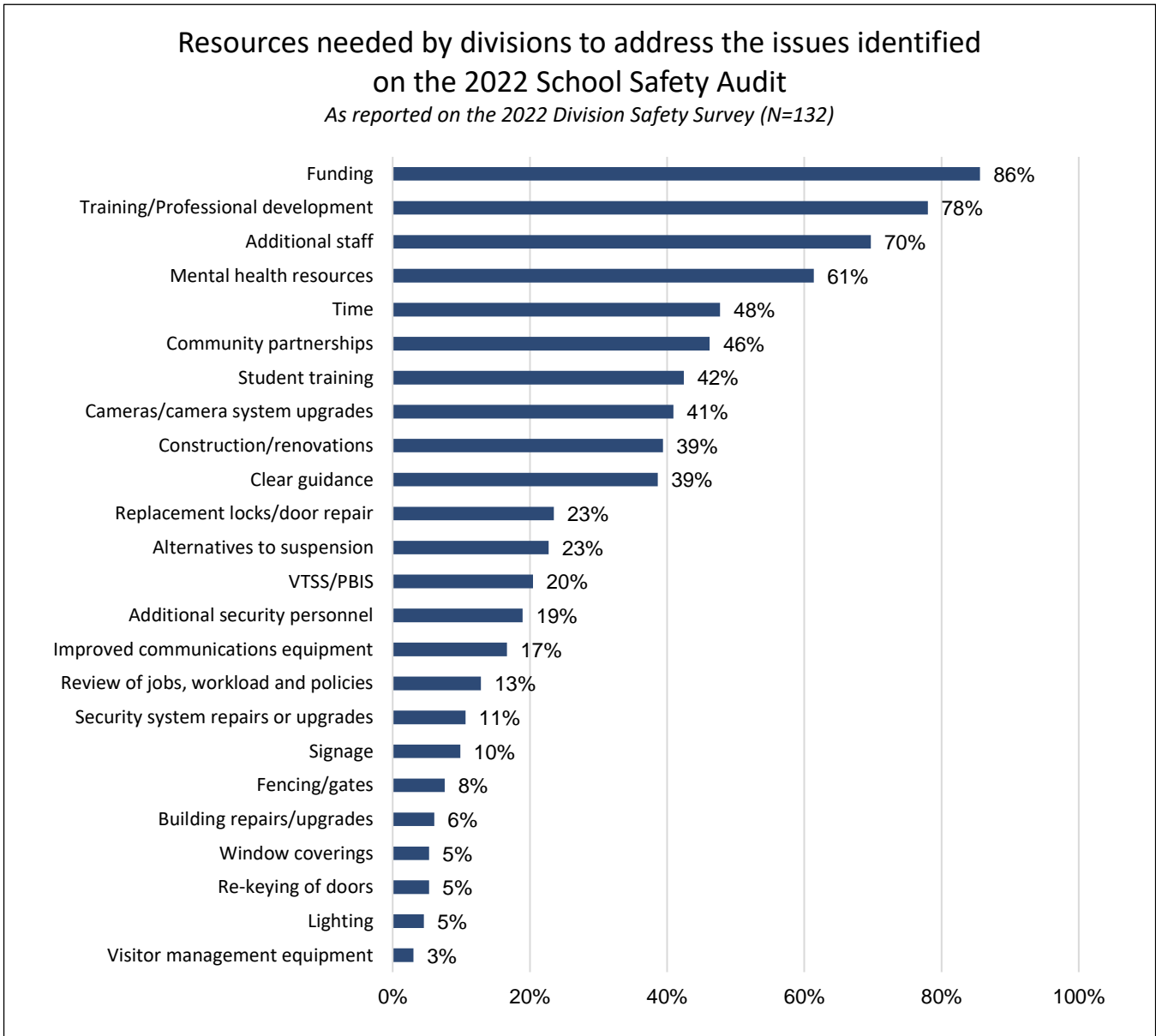
As reported on the 2022 Virginia School Survey of Climate and Working Conditions

■ Students (N=219,233) ■ Classroom instructors (N=20,048) ■ Staff (N=5,278)



Audit Review

The culminating component of the annual safety audit is a review of all relevant safety data to “... (i) **identify and if necessary, develop solutions for physical safety concerns**, including building security issues and (ii) **identify and evaluate any patterns of student safety concerns** occurring on school property or at school sponsored events. Solutions and responses shall include recommendations for structural adjustments, changes in school safety procedures, and revisions to the school board’s standards for student conduct.” Schools are asked to review four areas of data: school safety and crisis management, school climate, facilities, and any other area such as discipline or attendance. Schools identify two issues of concern for each area resulting in eight issues reported by each school and resources needed. These issues are then reported to the divisions, who are asked to report the top two in each category for their division (eight issues per division) as well as resources needed in order to address these issues.



2022 VIRGINIA SCHOOL SAFETY AUDIT HIGHLIGHTS