2024 DCJS Division of Public Safety Training and Virginia Center for School and Campus Safety *Highlights*

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INTRODUCTION

In 2000, the Virginia Center for School Safety was established by the *Code of Virginia* § 9.1-184 and placed within the Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS). Presently, the DCJS Division of Public Safety Training and Virginia Center for School and Campus Safety (PST-VCSCS) is responsible for conducting research and providing training, resources, and technical assistance to Virginia's public K-12 schools, institutions of higher education, and law enforcement officers.

This document aims to provide an overview of the critical data from all programs coordinated by PST-VCSCS, including comparisons across components and multi-year data trends.

The 2024 Virginia School Safety Audit

Since 1997, Virginia law has mandated that all public schools conduct annual safety audits as per the *Code of Virginia* § 22.1-279.8. These audits help schools and divisions identify and evaluate physical safety concerns and patterns of student and staff safety perceptions.

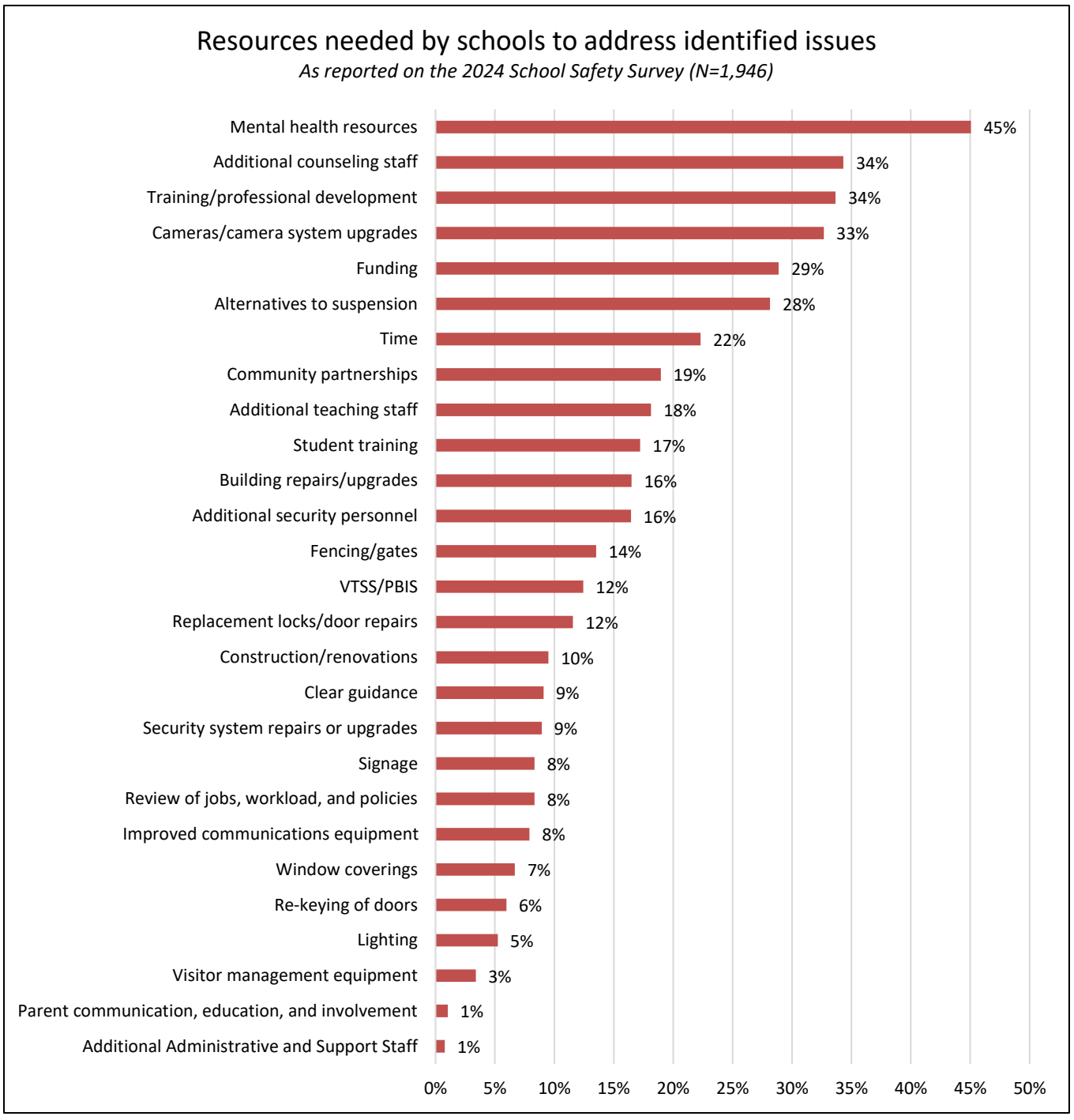
The Commonwealth of Virginia comprises 131 public school divisions, including the Virginia Department of Juvenile Justice Division of Education, Virginia's Academic-Year Governor's Schools, Regional Alternative Education Programs, Regional Career and Technical Programs, and the Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind. During the 2023–2024 school year, 1,946 traditional K-12 public schools and 30 non-traditional regional programs and governor's schools operated in Virginia. According to the Virginia Department of Education's Fall Membership database, 1,261,962 students were enrolled in public schools during the 2023–2024 school year.

Further information regarding the components of the School Safety Audit and copies of the survey instruments can be found on the DCJS website. Reports summarizing state-level results by item can be found at www.dcjs.virginia.gov/virginia-center-school-and-campus-safety/virginia-school-safety-audit-program.

AUDIT COMPONENT	2024 PARTICIPATION	SPECIFICS
School Safety Survey	1,946 schools	100% compliance
Non-Traditional School Survey	30 schools	100% compliance
Division Safety Survey	131 divisions	100% compliance
Crisis Management Plan – Review and Certification	131 divisions	100% compliance
Virginia School Survey of Climate and Working Conditions – Staff Survey	381 schools	18,424 classroom instructors (54% participation) 5,744 staff (31% participation)
Virginia School Survey of Climate and Working Conditions – Student Survey	333 schools	174,156 students in grades 9–12 (44% participation)
The School Safety Inspection Checklist – Completion and Certification	131 divisions	Next certification due 2026

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" (the *Code of Virginia* § 22.1-279.8). Schools are asked to review four areas of data: school safety and crisis management, school climate, facilities, and any other relevant data, such as discipline or attendance.

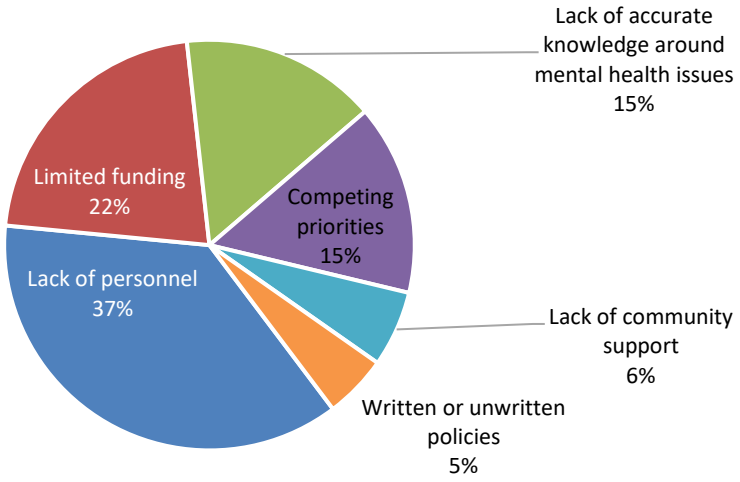


MENTAL HEALTH

In recent years, there has been a growing emphasis on the mental health of students and staff. Only 67% of administrators expressed confidence in their school's ability to offer adequate mental health support to students and staff during the 2023–2024 school year, a 6% increase from the 2022–2023 school year.

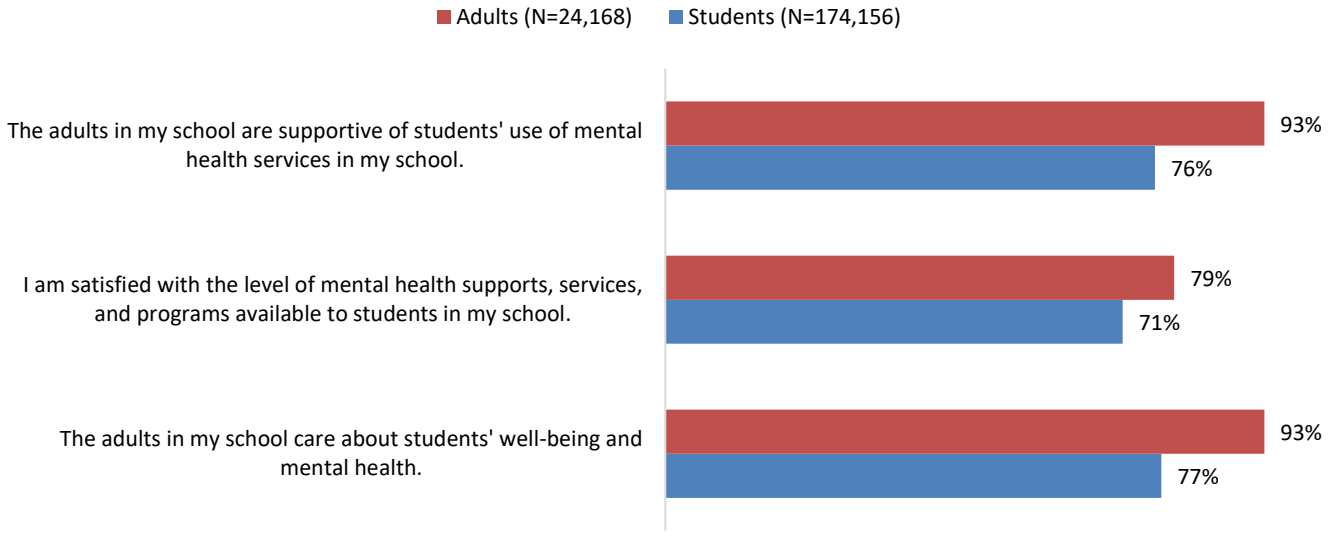
Top issues limiting schools' ability to provide sufficient mental health support to students and staff acording to the 33% of adminstrators reporting limitations

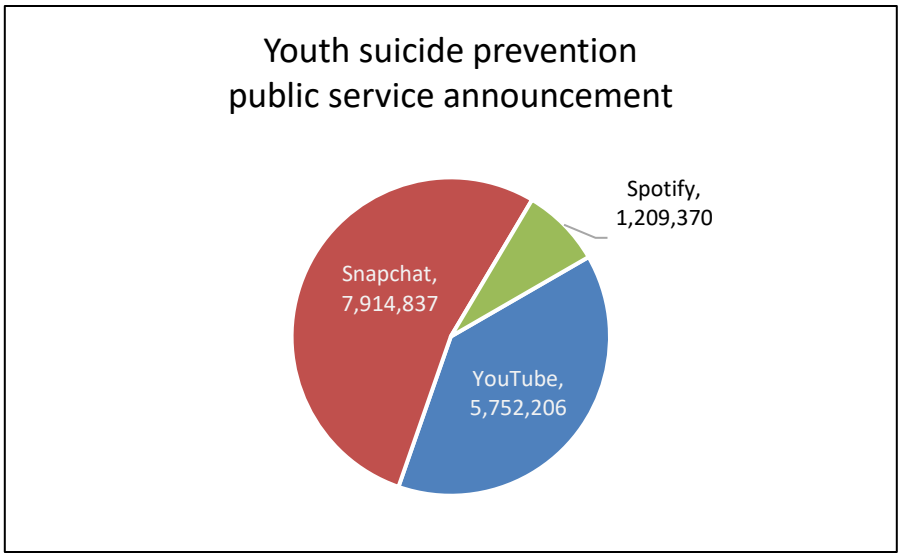
As reported on the 2024 School Safety Survey (N=637)



Percentage of high school students and adults responding slightly agree to strongly agree to the following statements

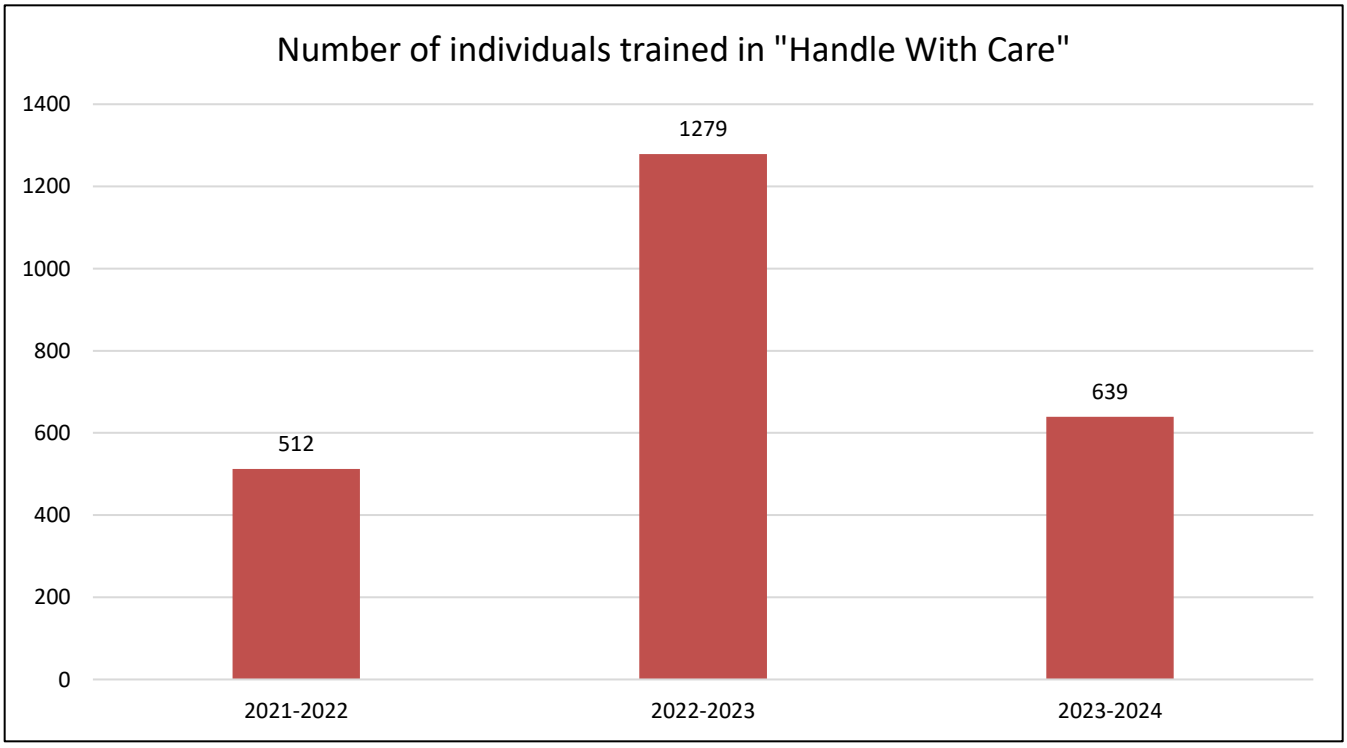
As reported on the 2024 Virginia School Survey of Climate and Working Conditions





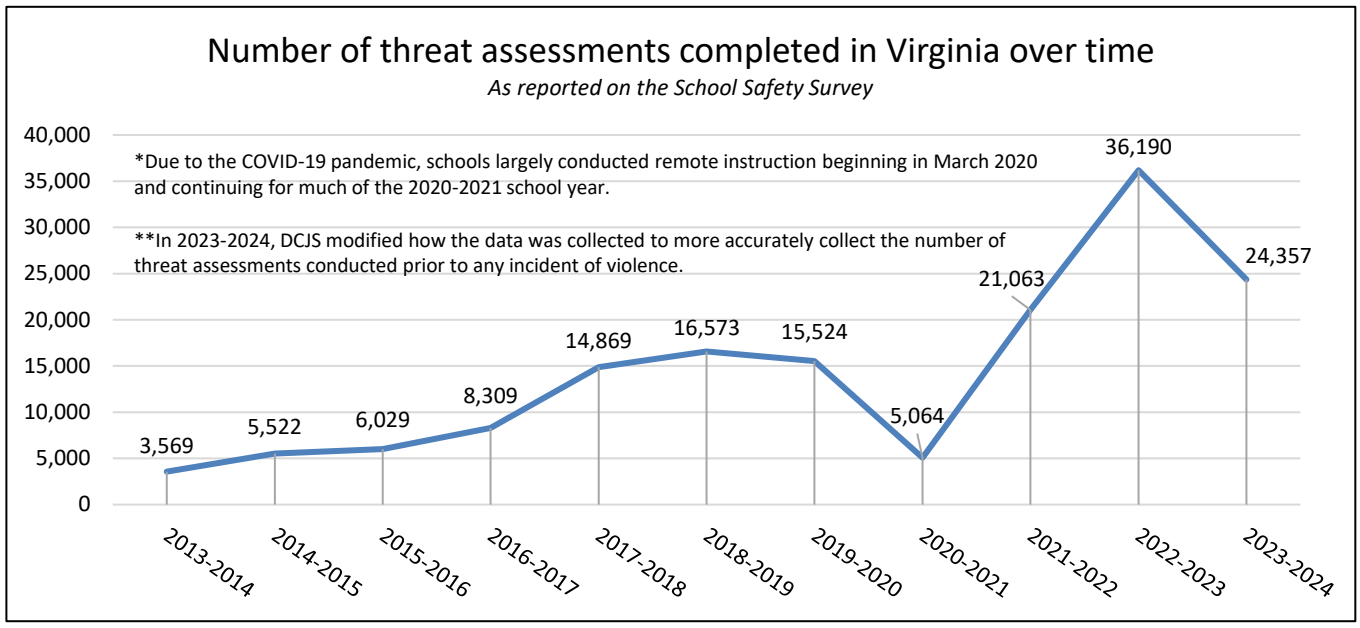
The public service announcement (PSA) campaign for Youth Suicide Prevention was broadcast on TV, radio, and specific social media platforms due to funding from the BJA STOP grant. The PSA campaign had over 3.7 million completed views on YouTube in the past year. It is important to note that these views include instances where the viewer chose to watch the entire spot, although an option to skip it was available. Data shows that social media is the most effective way to reach Virginia's youth, which is demonstrated by the success of the PSA campaign.

In 2021, PST-VCSCS introduced the "Handle With Care: Law Enforcement-School Trauma Informed Communication System" (HWC) across Virginia. This system 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, the child's information is shared with the school. The school then implements individual, class, and whole-school trauma-sensitive curricula to ensure that traumatized children are treated with care. Additionally, if a child needs more intervention, on-site trauma-focused mental healthcare is available at the school. Forty-six (46) Virginia school divisions have been fully trained in HWC, and three (3) additional divisions are in the process of training and adopting this system.



THREAT ASSESSMENT

In 2013, the Virginia General Assembly passed a law (the *Code of Virginia* § 22.1-79.4) that requires all public school divisions to create and operate threat assessment teams to support their schools. This legislation also requires PST-VCSCS to create model policies and collect data on threat assessments in public schools.

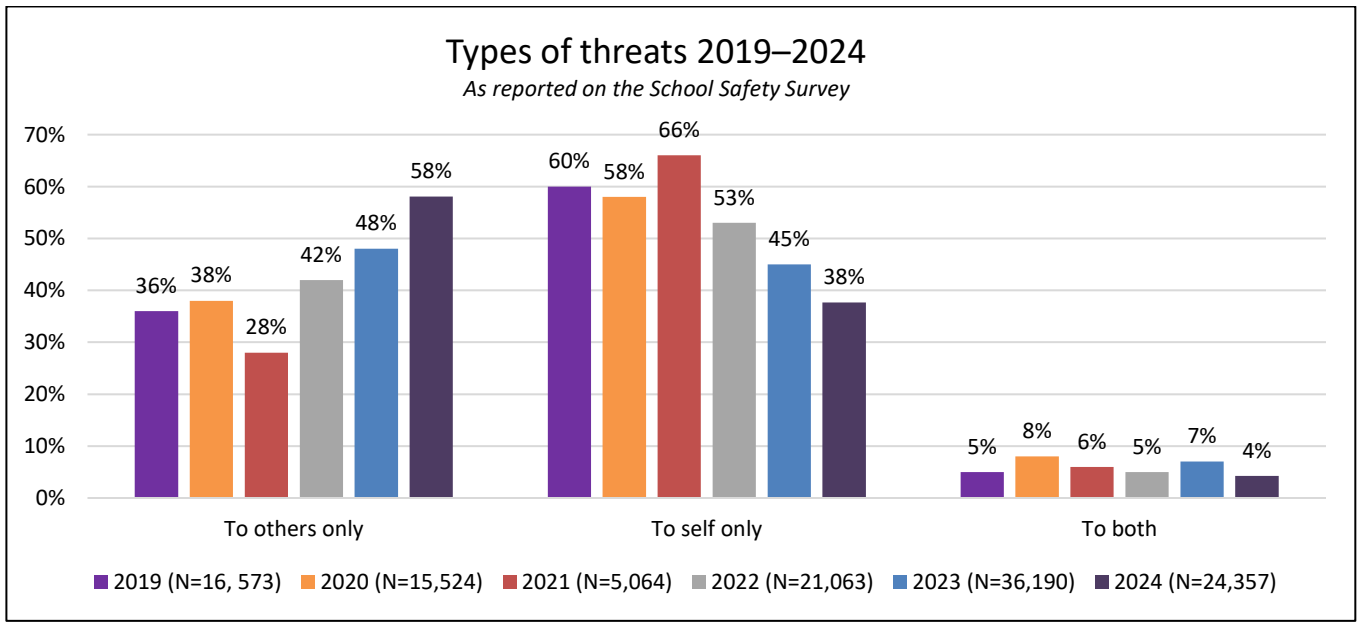


The following definitions were used to determine the type of threat:

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.

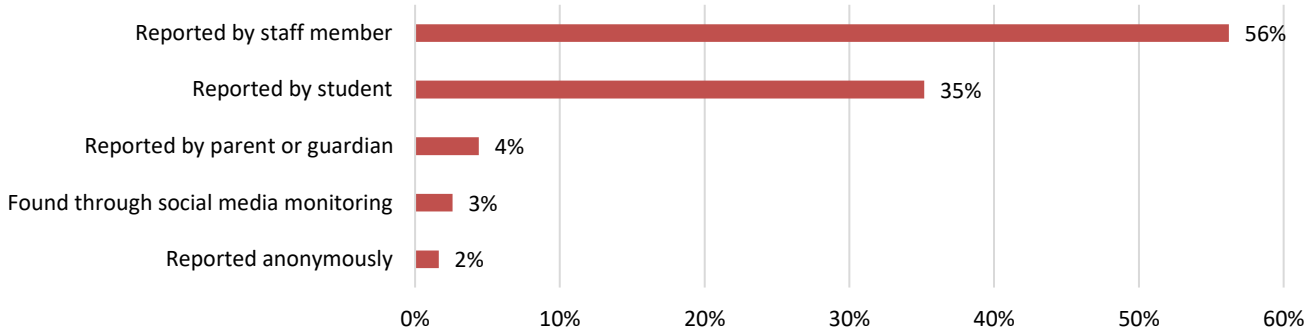
Threatened other(s) and self (to both): Threatened harm, posed harm to, or was perceived as posing harm to someone other than self AND threatened suicide or self-harm, or was perceived as suicidal or posing harm to self.

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.



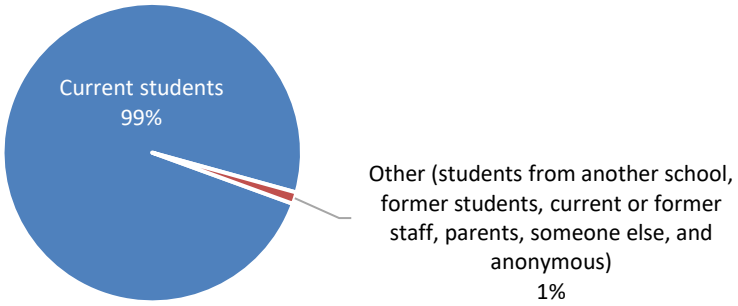
Methods used to alert threat assessment teams of threats and aberrant or concerning behavior

As reported on the 2024 School Safety Survey (N=28,185)



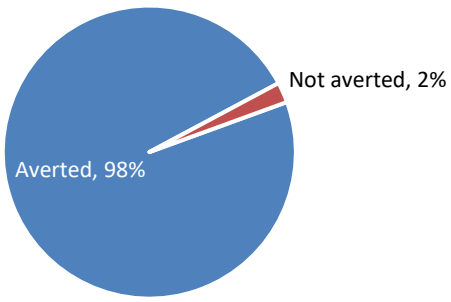
Individuals making threats or exhibiting aberrant or concerning behavior 2023–2024

As reported on the 2024 School Safety Survey (N=24,357)



Schools reported 632 Priority 1 (Critical/Imminent) and 1,548 (High) threats during the 2023–2024 school year. Of those, 49 threats were reported to not be averted.

As reported on the 2024 School Safety Survey (N=2,180)

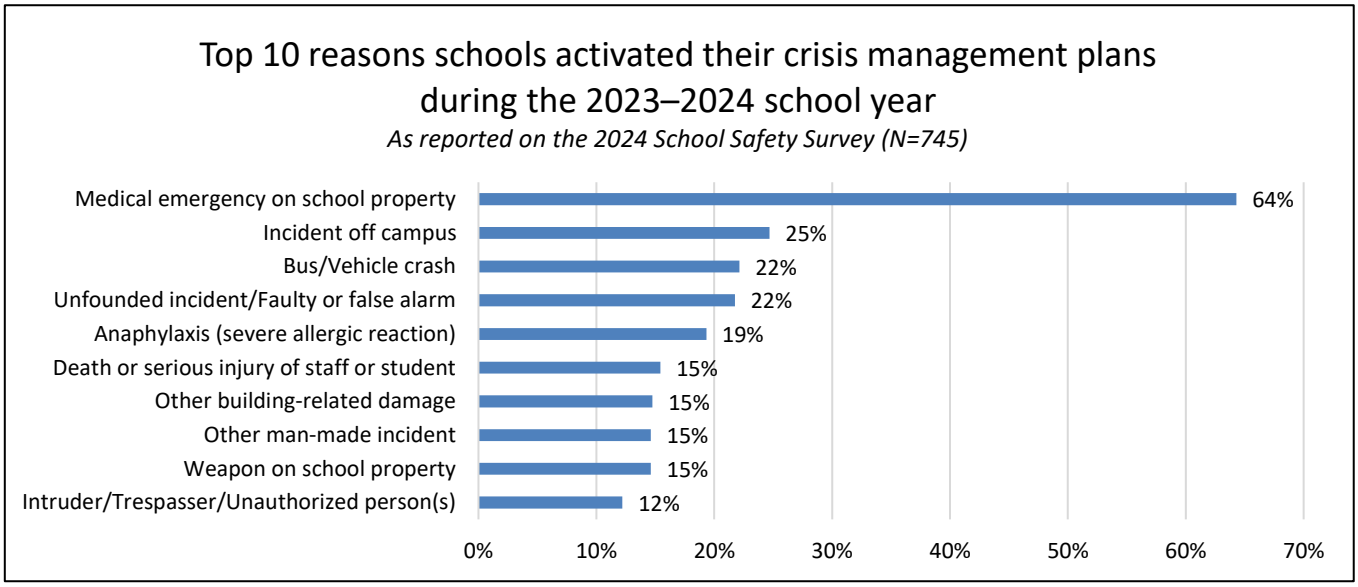


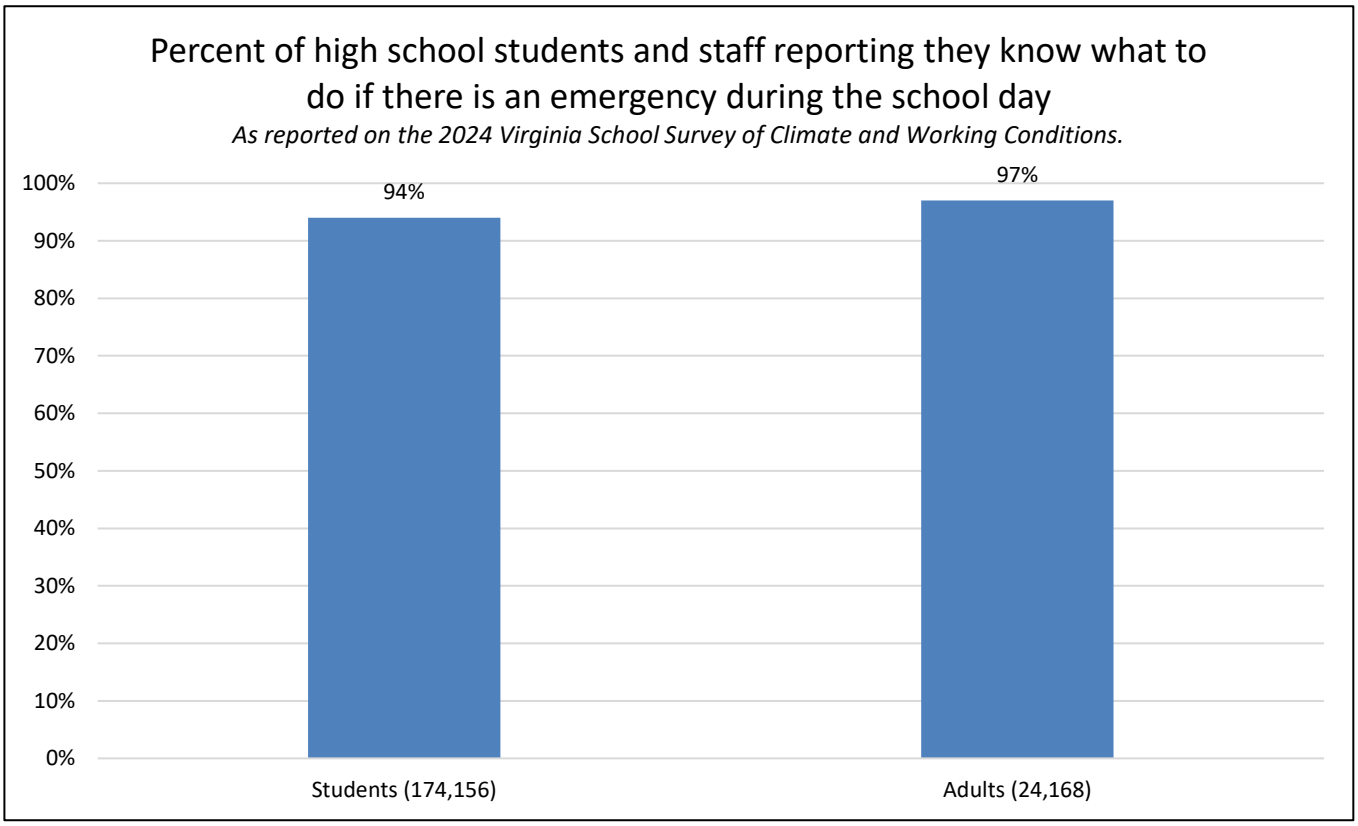
SAFETY PLANS AND CRISIS MANAGEMENT

PST-VCSCS addresses various topics related to school safety, including personnel, crisis management, school climate, and physical measures that help schools prepare for and respond to emergencies. By focusing on these areas, PST-VCSCS aims to enhance the safety and security of school communities across Virginia.

Emergency Planning

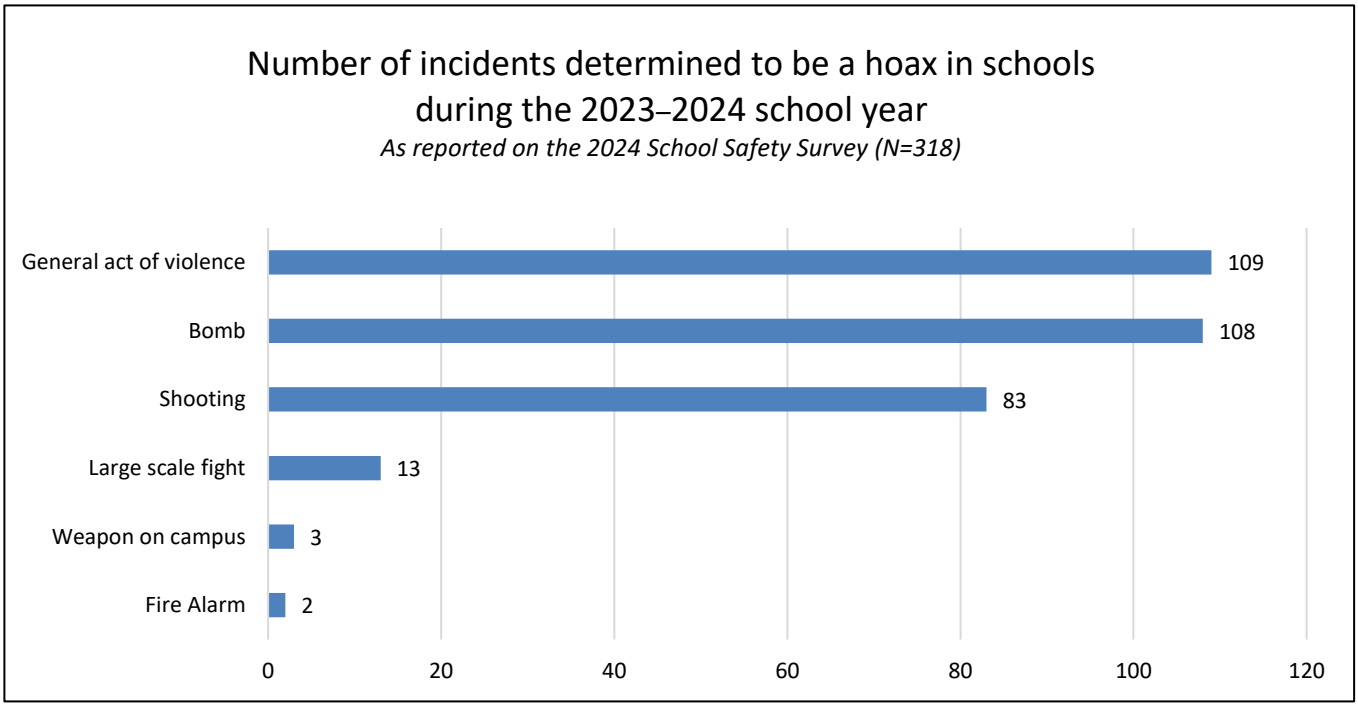
On the 2024 Virginia School Survey of Climate and Working Conditions, 96% of staff reported feeling confident in their ability to direct and assist students during an emergency.

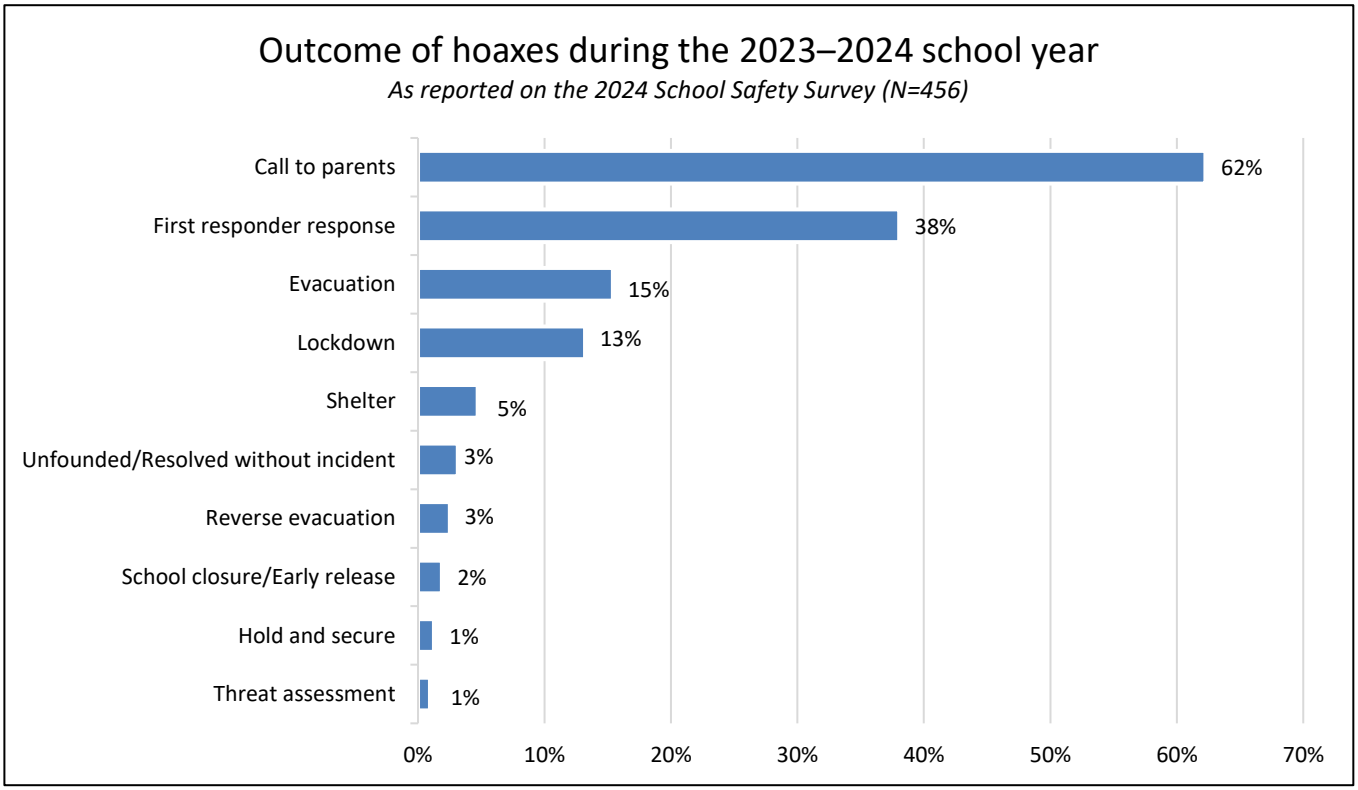




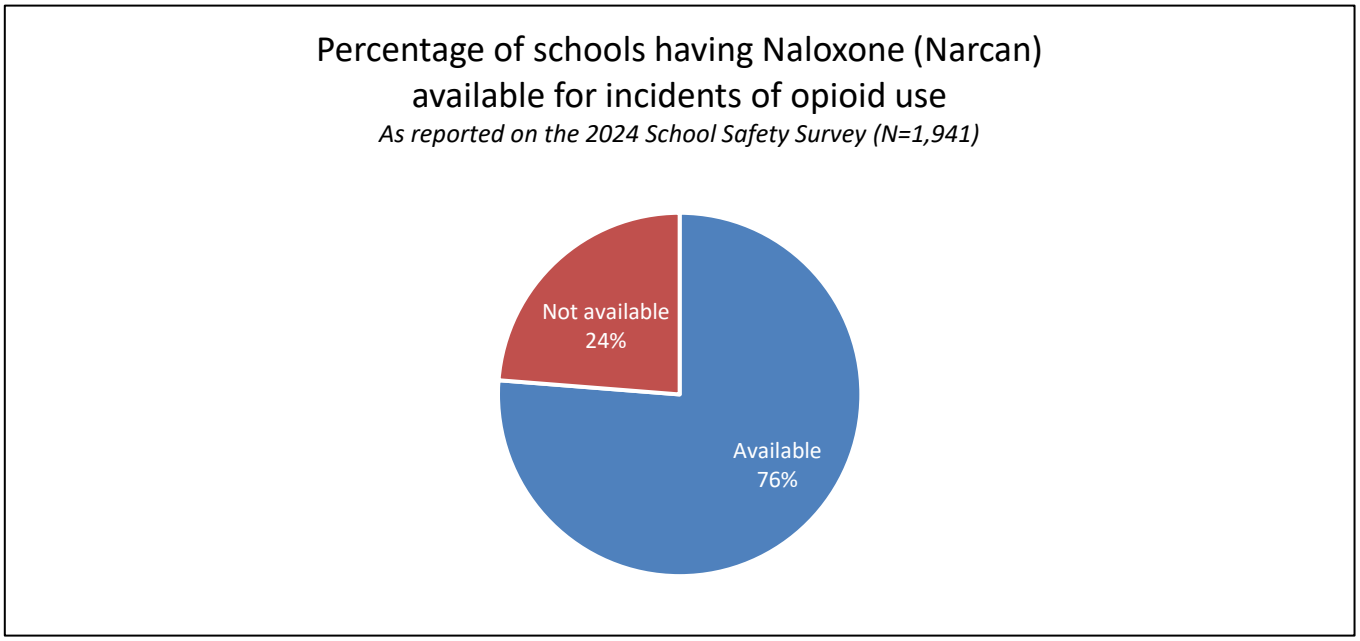
In 2023–2024, the nation saw increased swatting calls and hoax threats to schools and other organizations. Swatting is defined by the Department of Homeland Security as making malicious hoax calls to emergency services to misreport an emergency. The intent is to cause large-scale deployment of Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) and other special units. Hoax threats are designed to disrupt, distract, or harass organizations.

During the 2023–2024 school year, 190 schools in Virginia reported receiving safety-related communications determined to be hoaxes, such as a bomb threat, swatting call, or other concerning information.

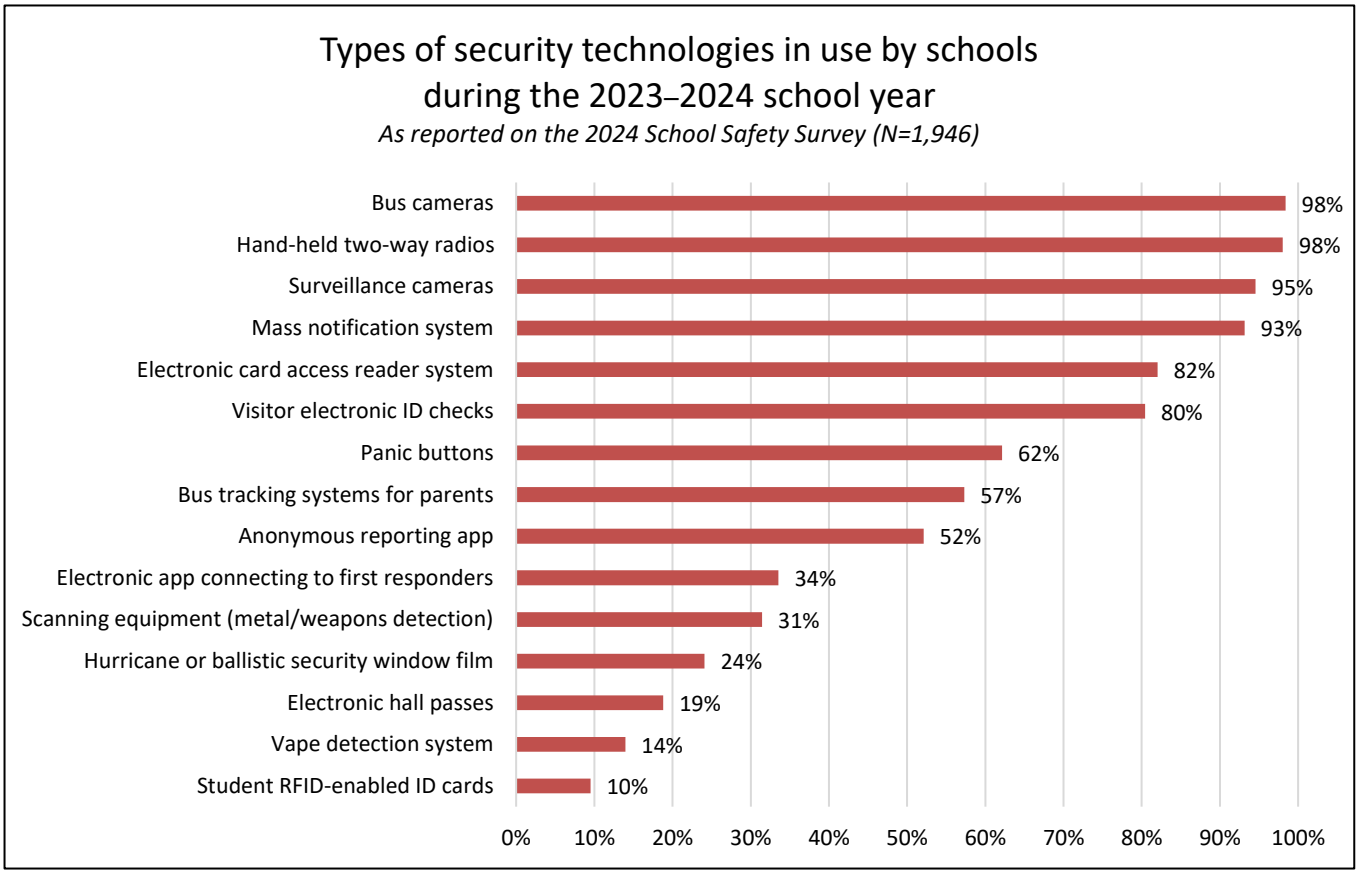




In response to an increase in opioid-related drug overdoses in schools, Executive Order 28 was issued in November 2023. This required the Virginia Department of Education to provide guidance on 24-hour parental notification, school-law enforcement collaboration, and educational programs to prevent student overdoses.



House Bill 561 was approved in April 2024, requiring schools to include security technology assessments in their annual safety audits.

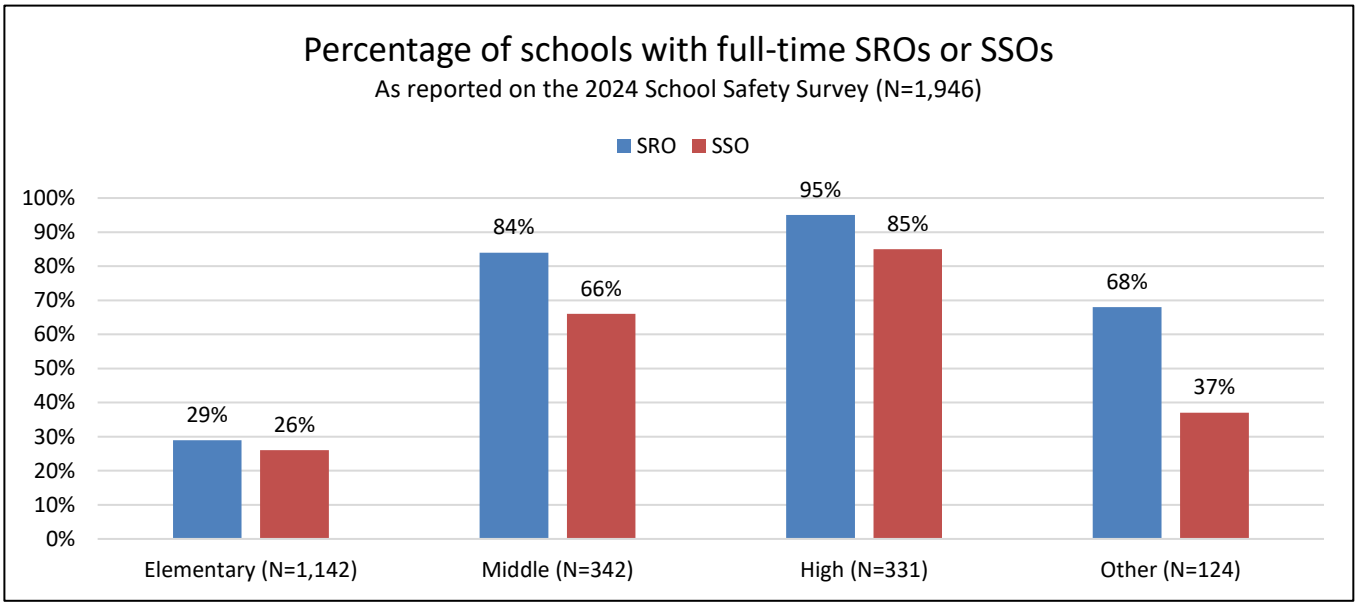


SECURITY PERSONNEL

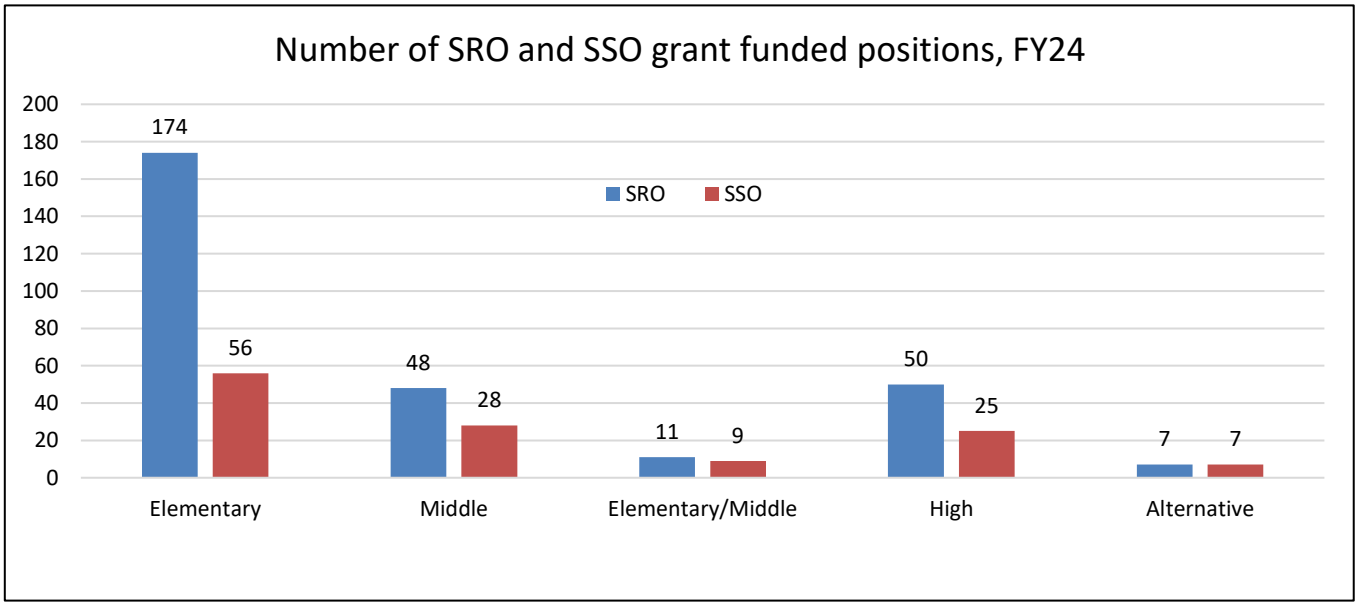
Two main types of security personnel serve to keep schools safe across the Commonwealth of Virginia.

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.*"

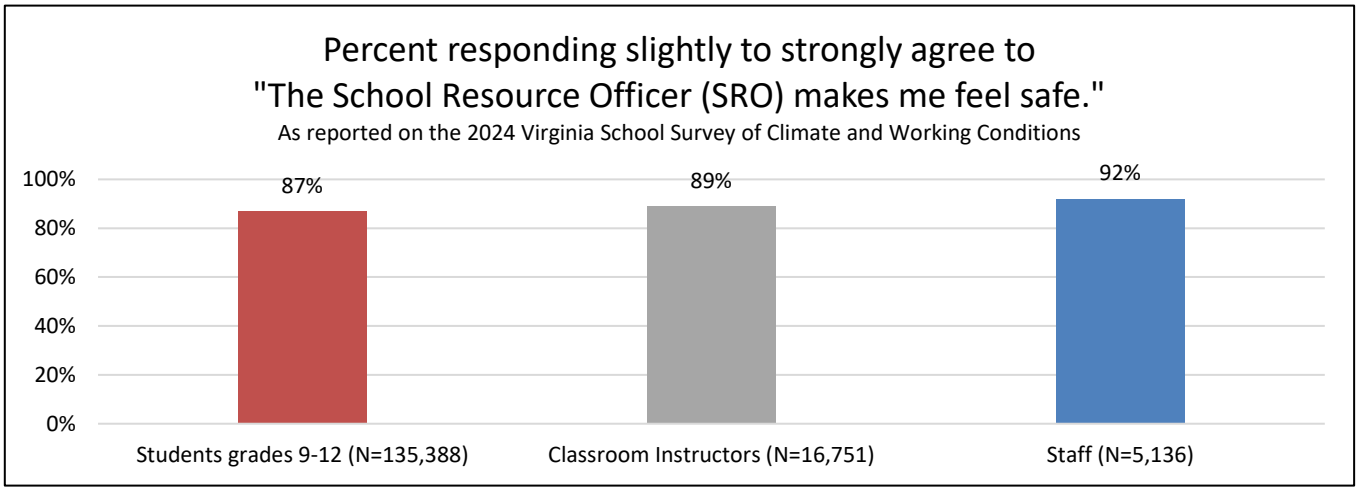
A School Security Officer (SSO) is defined in the *Code of Virginia* § 9.1-101 as "*… an individual who is employed by the local school board or a private or religious school for the singular purpose of maintaining order and discipline, preventing crime, investigating violations of the policies of the 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.*"

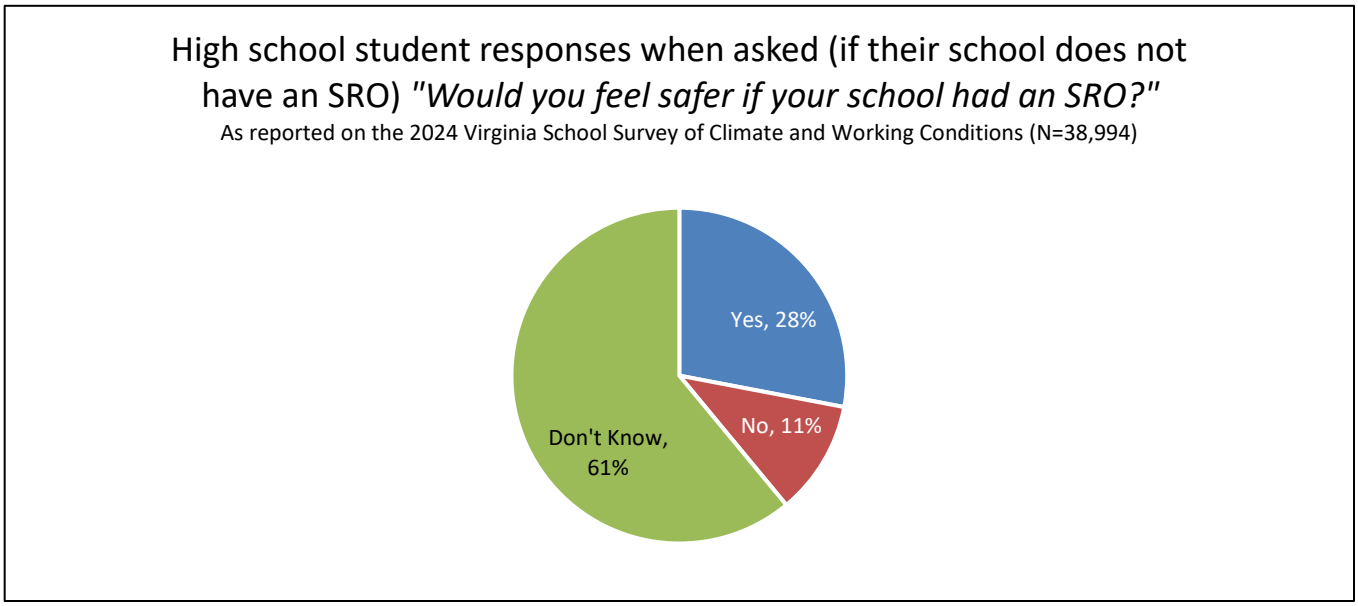


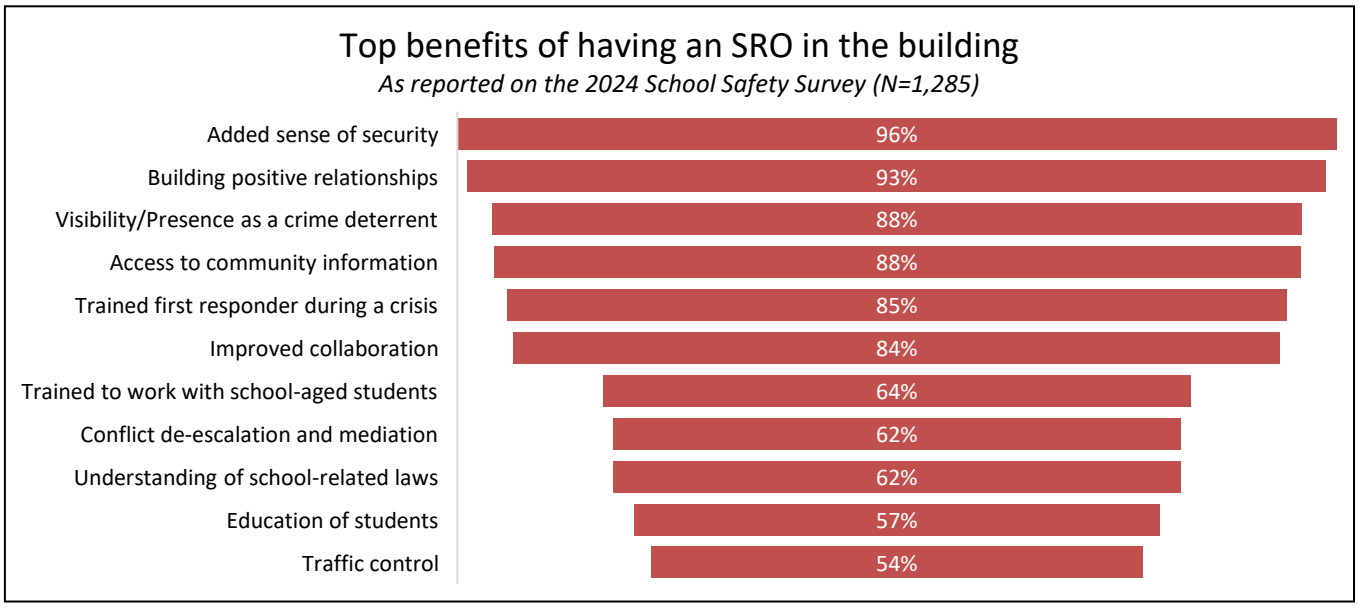
The FY24 DCJS SRO/SSO Incentive Grant Program provided funding to localities to place either a School Resource Officer or School Security Officer in elementary and secondary schools where none existed.



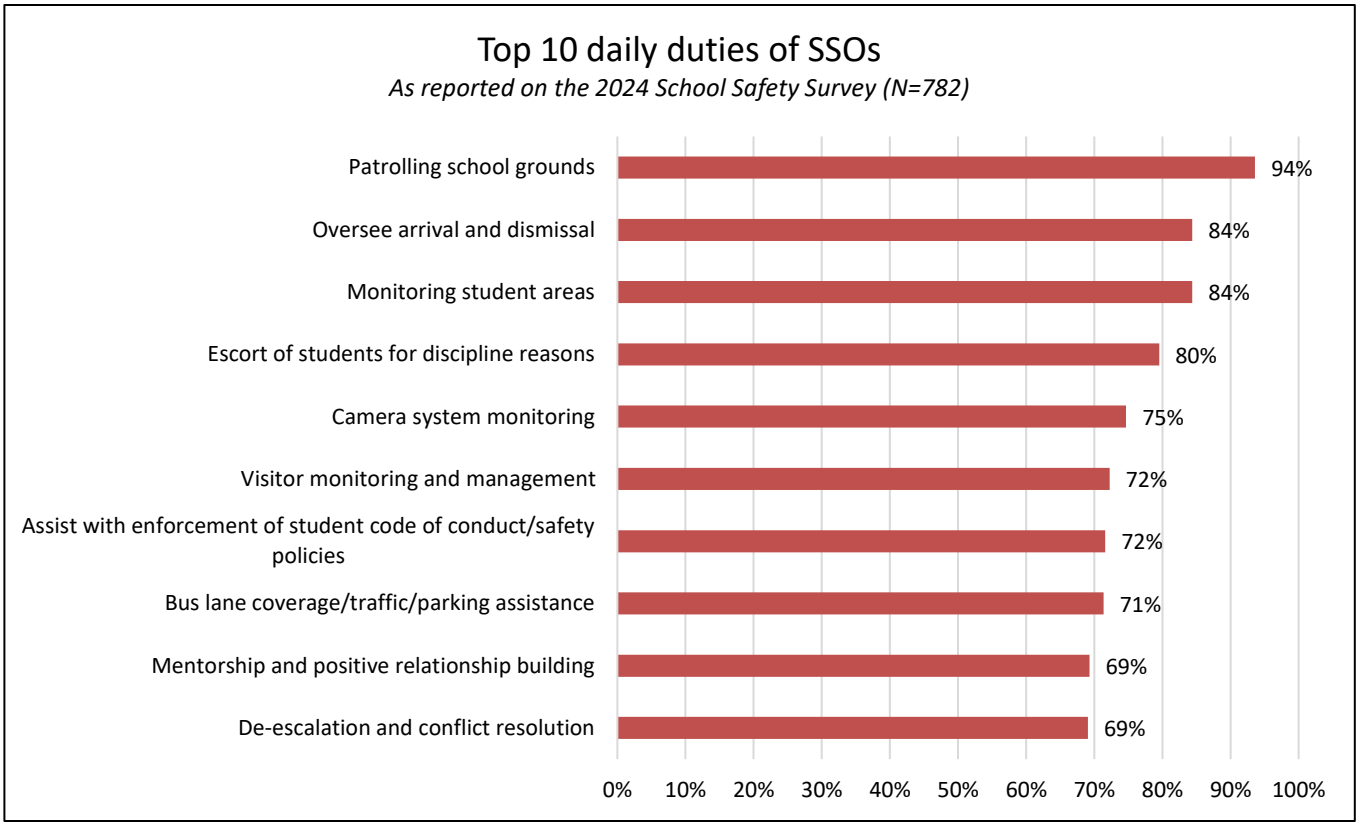
School Resource Officers (SRO)

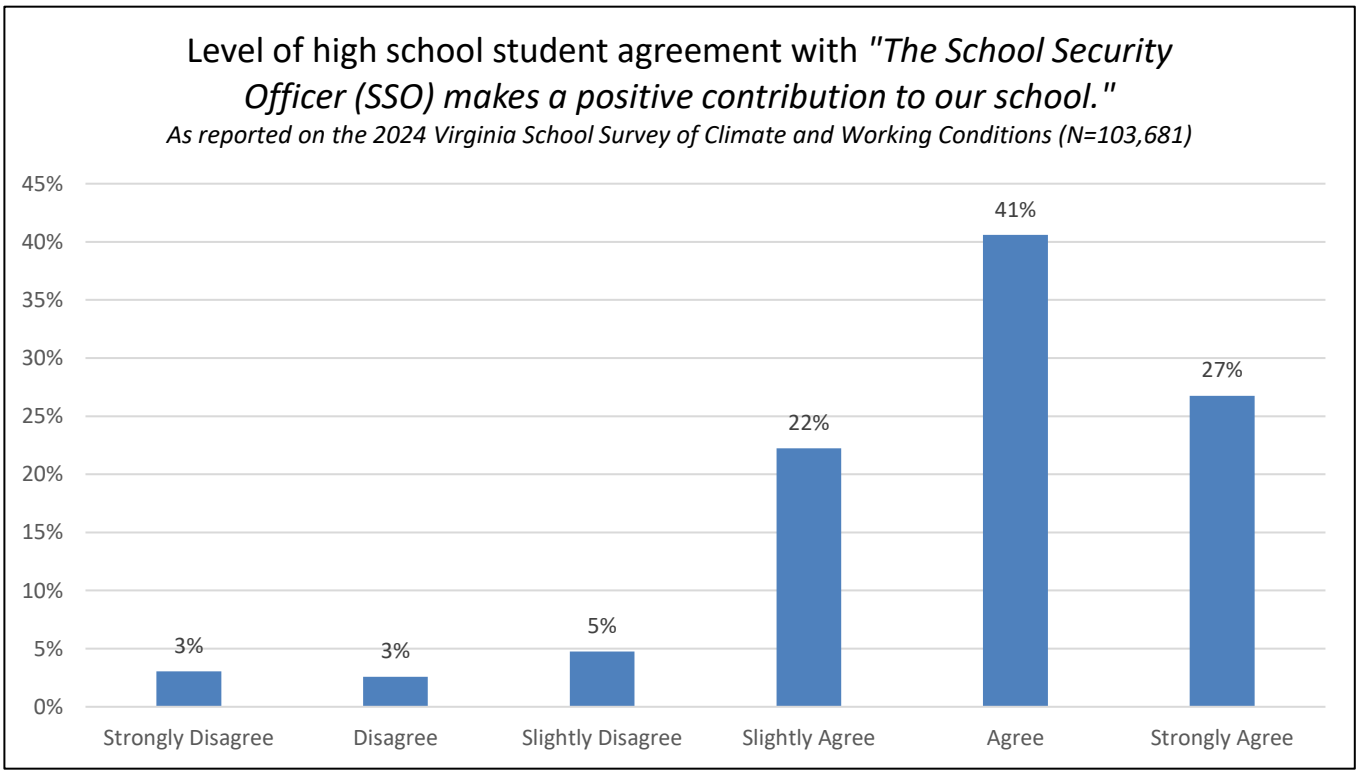






School Security Officers (SSO)



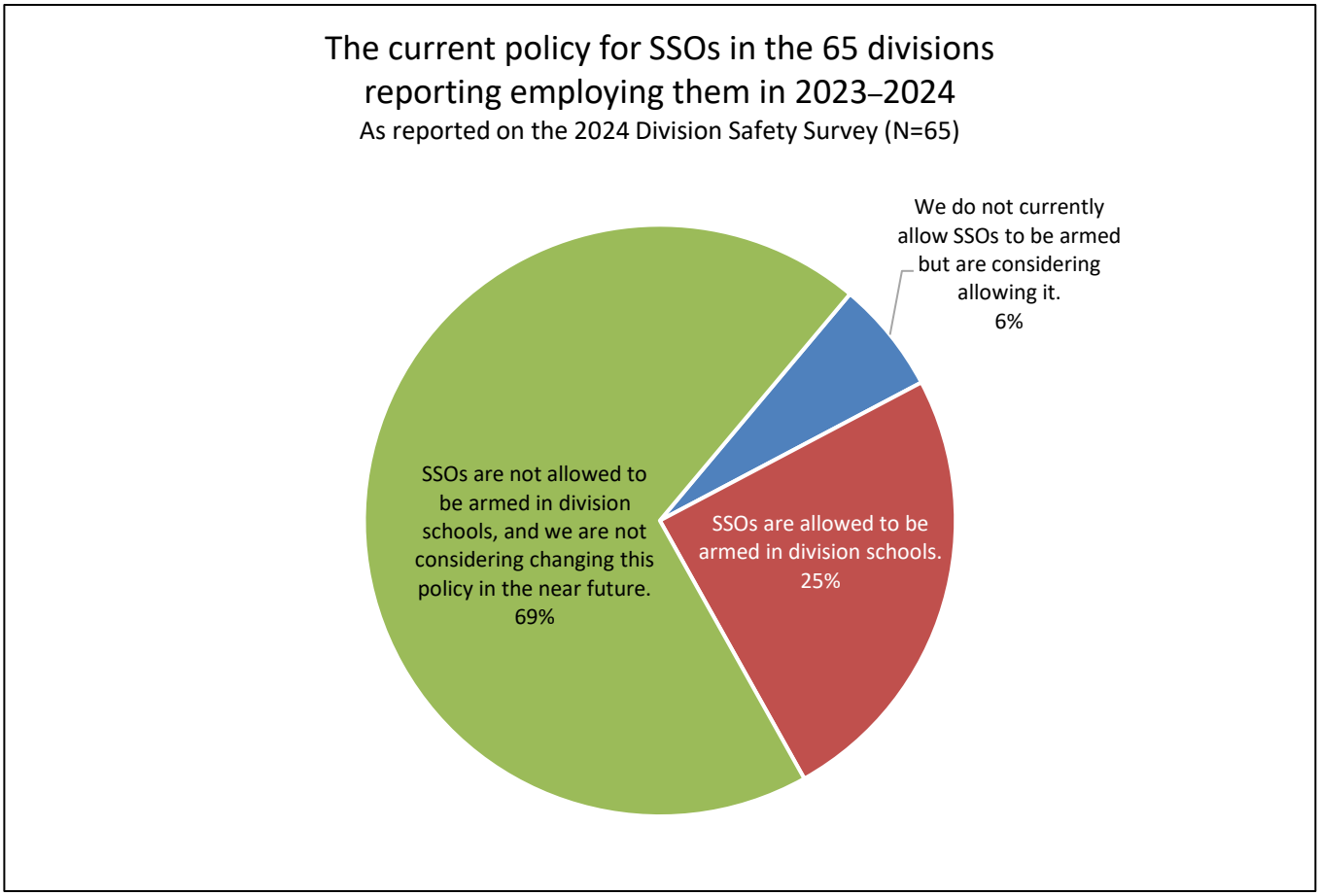


Local school boards and private or religious schools may employ school security officers, as defined in the *Code of Virginia* § 9.1-101, for the purposes set forth therein. Such a school security officer may carry a firearm in the performance of their duties if the SSO:

- Is a former law enforcement officer within 10 years from the hire date with the school;
- Is retired or resigned from their position in law enforcement in good standing;
- Meets the training and qualifications standards described in subsection C of the *Code of Virginia* § 18.2-308.016; and
- Provides proof of training completion in Active Shooter Emergency Response, Emergency Evacuation Procedure, and Threat Assessment;
- If training is provided by law enforcement, it shall be in the locality in which the officer is employed as an SSO.

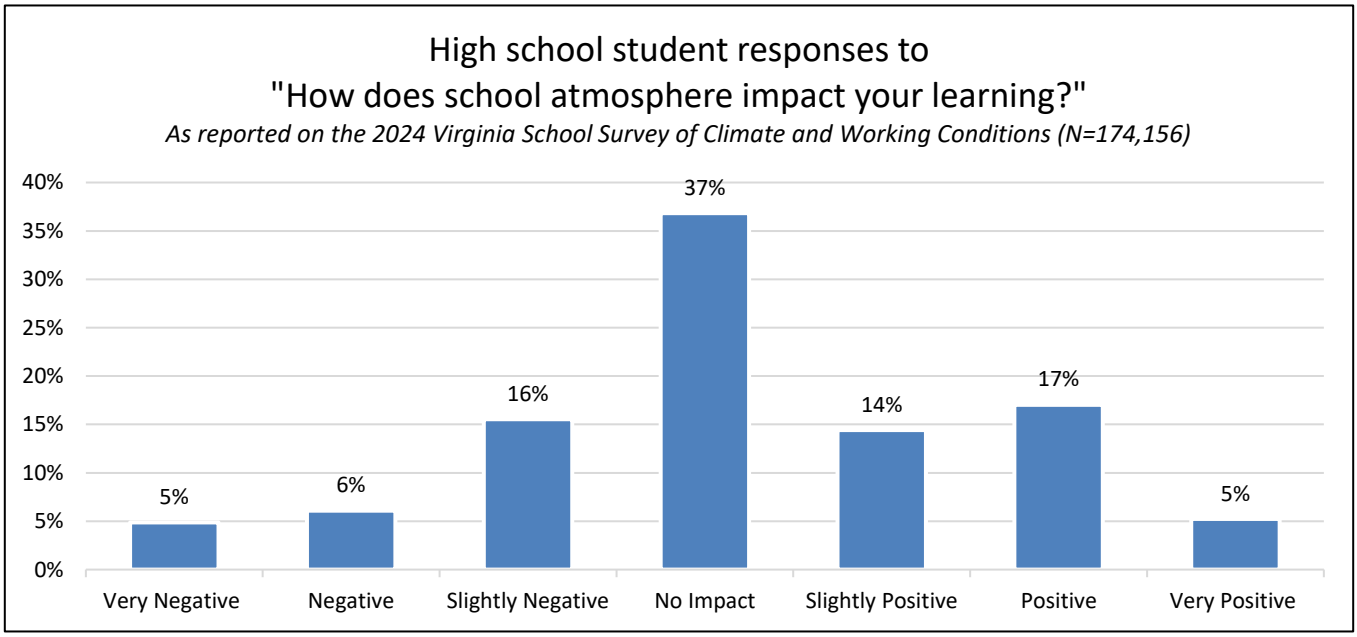
Additionally,

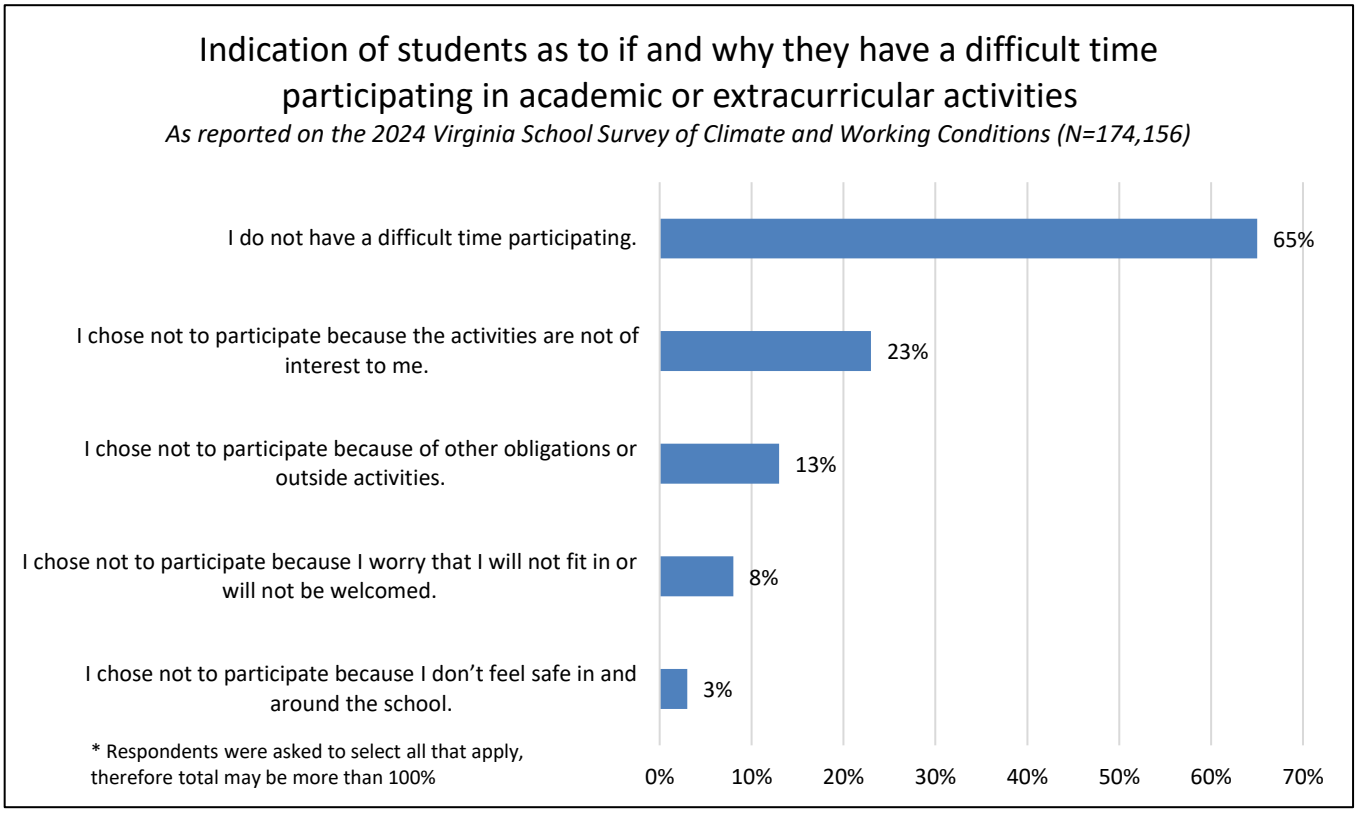
- Local school board or private or religious school shall solicit input from the chief law enforcement officer of the locality to ensure the SSO is not prohibited by state or federal law from possessing, purchasing, or transporting a firearm.
- The local school board or private or religious school must grant the SSO authority to carry a firearm in the performance of his duties.



SCHOOL CLIMATE

The Virginia School Survey of Climate and Working Conditions aims to gather information on school climate, safety, and working conditions. The survey is designed to help maintain a safe and orderly school environment conducive to learning. It measures the perceptions of school rules and discipline, teacher-student relationships, student engagement, and the prevalence of bullying and teasing on campus. The survey is administered to students, teachers, and staff, and their responses provide valuable insights into the school's overall climate and culture.





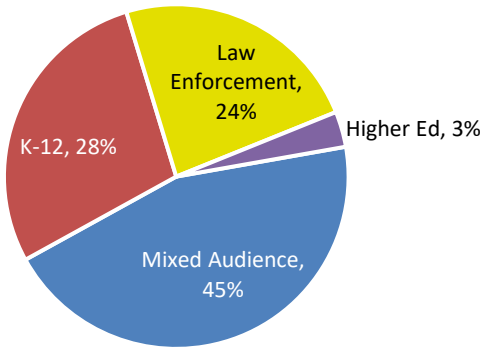
TRAINING AND GRANTS

PST-VCSCS conducts research, creates guidance and resources, provides training on various safety issues that affect all Virginians, and provides grant funding. In FY24, PST-VCSCS hosted six conferences that brought together local, state, and national experts to provide relevant and impactful networking and learning opportunities to over 2,100 participants from school, campus, law enforcement, and mental health backgrounds.

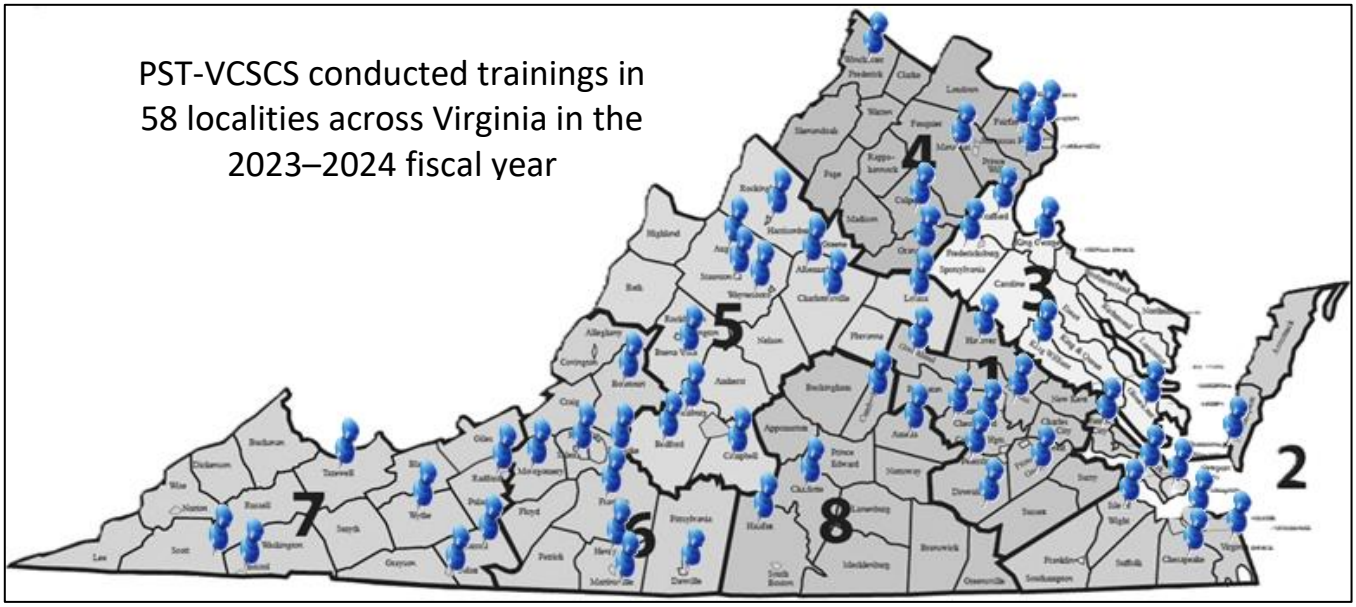
Conferences hosted in FY24:

- Impact of Trauma on Law Enforcement Officers Conference
- National Threat Assessment Conference for Educational Institutions
- School Safety Training Forum
- Strengthening Connections: The Power of Prevention Summit
- Conference on Violent Crime
- Virginia Campus Safety and Violence Prevention Forum

PST-VCSCS provided training to 16,880 participants across 329 in-person trainings and 94 virtual trainings, FY24

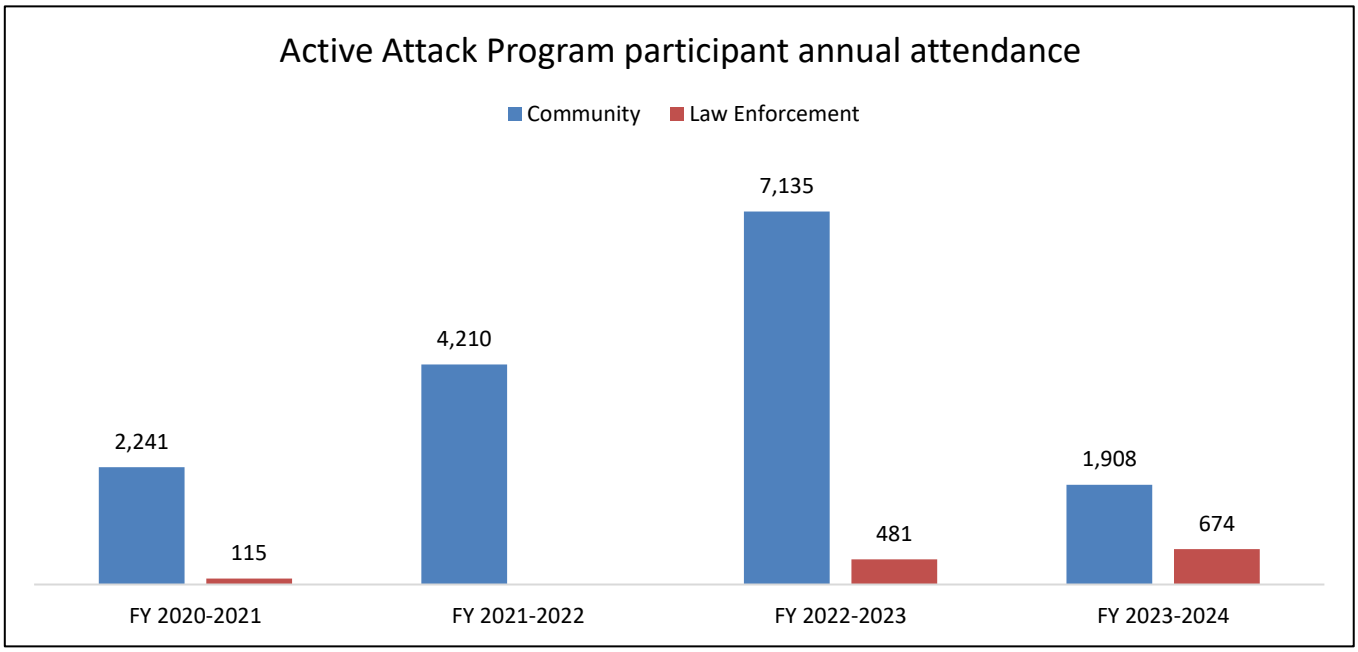


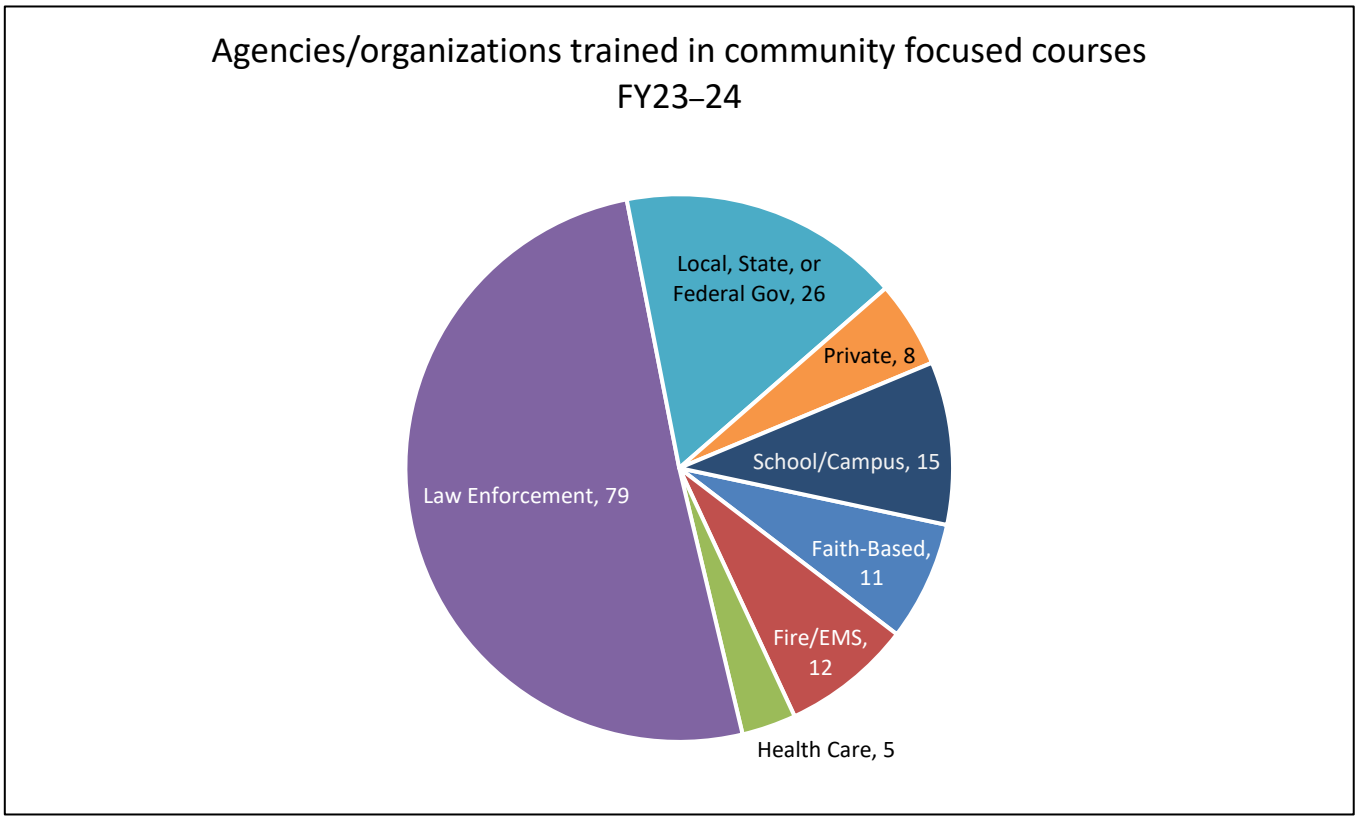
PST-VCSCS conducted trainings in 58 localities across Virginia in the 2023–2024 fiscal year



Active Attack Program

PST-VCSCS has a robust Active Attack Program that trains law enforcement and civilians on proper response to active attack emergencies. During the 2023–2024 fiscal year, this program conducted 97 courses, training 2,582 participants through 62 citizen-focused trainings and 35 multi-day first responder trainings.





Public Safety and Law Enforcement Program

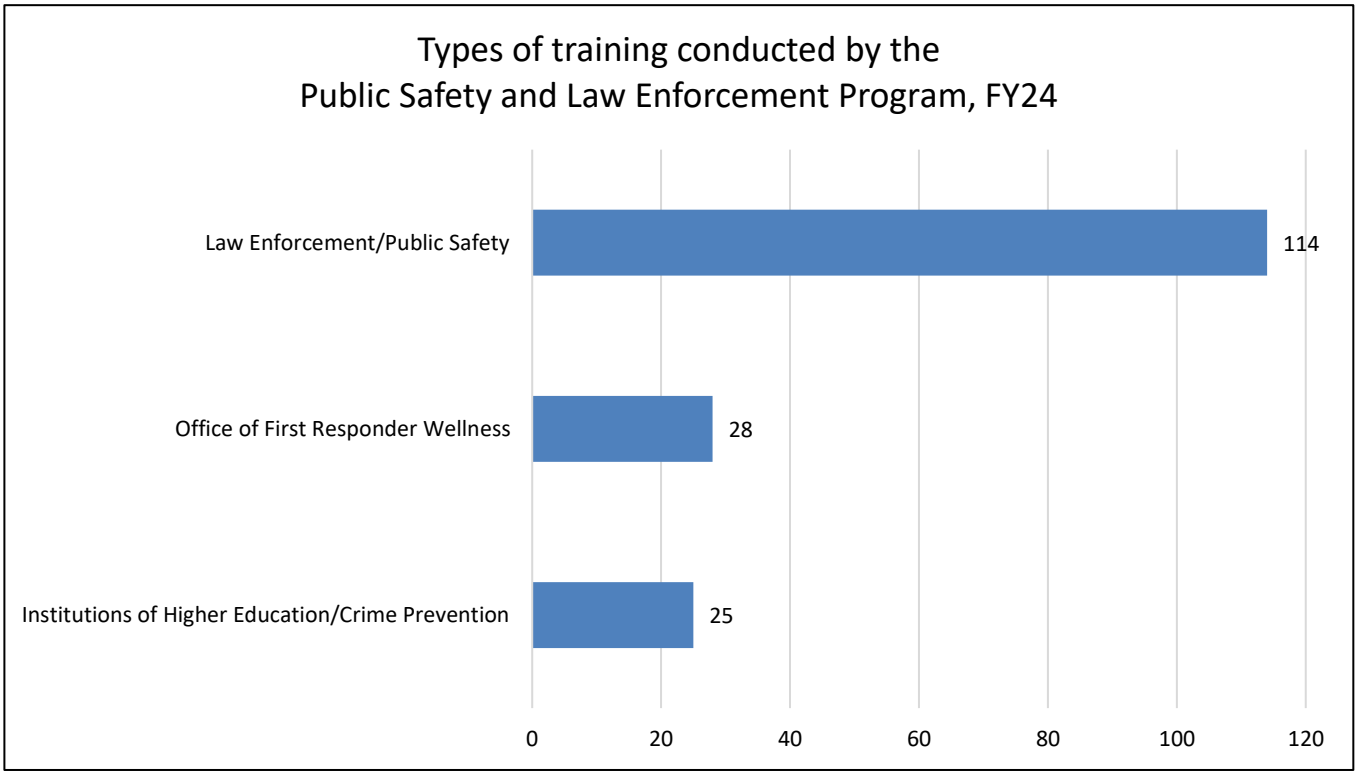
The Public Safety and Law Enforcement Program is designed to provide vital training, technical assistance, program development, and resources to various public safety stakeholders. Constituents include state and local government entities, law enforcement personnel, campus security officers, and professional organizations. The program's primary goal is to support implementing and managing campus safety, law enforcement resources, and crime prevention strategies. Training opportunities are diverse, available in in-person, virtual, and e-learning formats, covering essential topics such as:

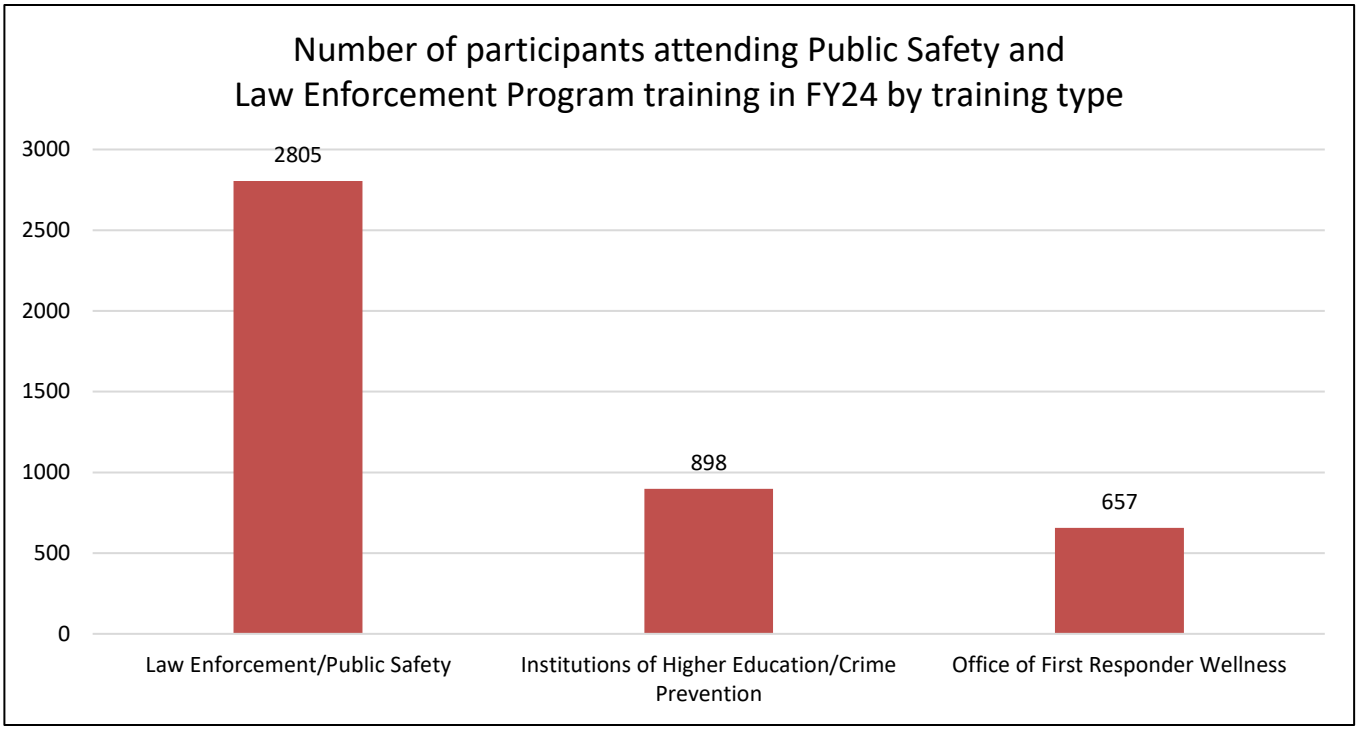
- First responder wellness
- Criminal investigations
- Gangs and drug-related issues
- Constitutional law
- Interviewing and interrogation techniques
- Campus safety protocols
- Mental health awareness
- Crime prevention methods

In addition to regular training, the program also hosts three key annual conferences:

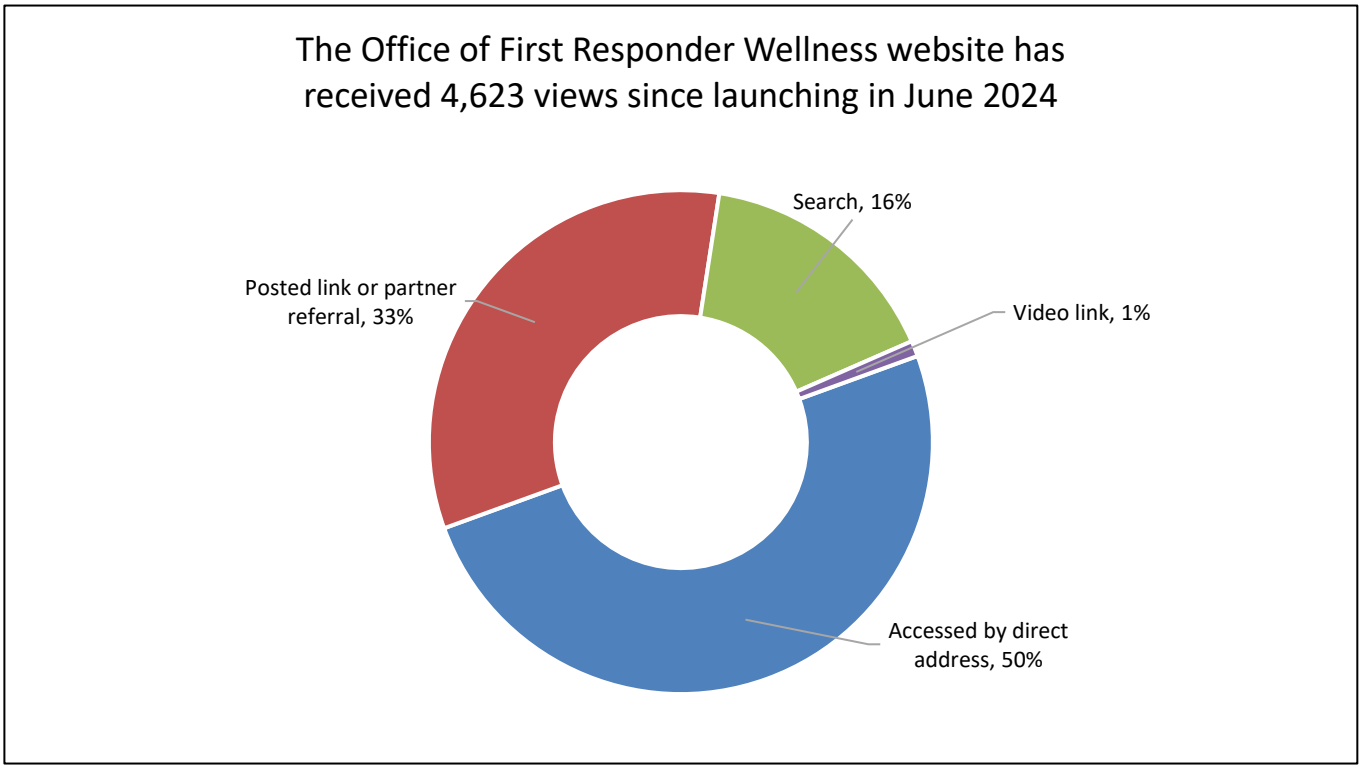
1. Campus Safety Forum
2. Violent Crime Conference
3. First Responder Wellness Conference

These conferences bring together national and local experts who share best practices, analyze crime trends, and discuss contemporary methods and strategies to improve public safety across the state.





The Office of First Responder Wellness (OFRW) was established in 2023 through a Byrne/Justice Assistance Grant. It provides a coordinated and consolidated system of care and support for first responders affected by vicarious trauma through peer support services, post-critical incident stress seminars, suicide prevention, and other related training and services. A public safety announcement campaign aired 1,380 TV and radio spots and had 18,425 views on YouTube, where 75% of viewers watched till the end.



Law Enforcement Grants and Programs

The Law Enforcement Grants and Programs section oversees federal and state funding for localities, state agencies, and nonprofit organizations. It also supports law enforcement and other criminal justice agencies throughout Virginia. In FY24, this section monitored 15 grant appropriations, resulting in 1,148 grants.

Program	Number of Awarded Grants Monitored, FY24	Program Allocation
"599"	173	$229,617,788
American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA)	330	$75,000,000
SRO/SSO Incentive Grant Program	192	$27,200,000
Byrne Justice Assistance Grant (JAG)/Local Law Enforcement (LOLE)	398	$19,358,154
Internet Crimes Against Children (ICAC)	3	$4,304,967
Combatting Hate Crimes Grant (HCGP)	7	$1,500,000
Witness Protection Grant Program (WPGP)	18	$1,200,000
Coverdell Forensic Science (CDEL)	2	$557,000
Project Safe Neighborhoods (PSN)	8	$370,000
Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM)	2	$300,000
John R. Justice Loan Repayment (JRJ)	16	$110,000
Commonwealth JAG Funding (DFS)	1	$107,730
Drug Abuse Resistance Education (DARE)	1	$100,000
Impact Living Services – Impact First Responders (IFR)	1	$95,000
TOTAL	**1,148**	**$359,820,639**