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Improving School Safety Through Bystander Reporting:

# **A TOOLKIT FOR STRENGTHENING K-12 REPORTING PROGRAMS**



**U.S. Department of Homeland Security**  
Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency  
United States Secret Service



# A MESSAGE FROM THE CYBERSECURITY AND INFRASTRUCTURE SECURITY AGENCY & THE UNITED STATES SECRET SERVICE

Schools provide the foundation for our nation's success. They play a vital role not just in student learning, but also in the development of children's social, emotional, and interpersonal skills. To ensure the academic success and emotional well-being of all students, schools must foster a safe and nurturing environment where students feel empowered to express their concerns and where student voices are heard.

Reporting programs are designed to provide students and other community members with a trusted avenue for seeking help and reporting concerns when issues arise involving student wellness or safety. These systems facilitate early intervention when concerns are reported, thereby helping to prevent targeted violence and other negative outcomes in K-12 schools. Schools often face challenges in developing or adopting reporting systems, however, as the available resources and expertise may be limited. Additionally, many students and adults are reluctant to report information, even when reporting platforms and programs have been made available.

In a combined effort to improve and encourage reporting, the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) Infrastructure Security Division's School Safety Task Force, and the United States Secret Service (USSS) National Threat Assessment Center (NTAC) have partnered to publish the CISA-USSS K-12 Bystander Reporting Toolkit (toolkit). The guidance provided herein

was developed through a literature review and more than 30 interviews with school, district, community, and state-level stakeholders involved in K-12 school safety, behavioral threat assessment, and reporting nationwide.

This toolkit represents the latest effort in CISA's and USSS's shared school safety mission, which includes providing schools with actionable, practical, and cost-efficient steps toward preventing harm or acts of violence among our most important populations. CISA works with partners to defend against an evolving and unique set of threats, hazards, and security challenges facing schools, and it collaborates to build a more secure and resilient school infrastructure for the future. USSS has maintained a focus on preventing targeted school violence for over 20 years by providing research, training, and consultation on multidisciplinary behavioral threat assessment programs and the prevention of targeted school violence. Together, CISA and USSS are working to ensure all children in our nation's schools are safe.

Sincerely,

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The willingness of bystanders to come forward with concerns for the wellness and safety of themselves or others is a key component of student health and violence prevention efforts in kindergarten through 12th grade (K-12) schools. The CISA-USSS K-12 Bystander Reporting Toolkit is designed to help community leaders create tailored, customized approaches to encourage reporting that meet the needs of their unique communities. It can be used to inform safety planning for the range of K-12 schools across the United States and is applicable to diverse geographical contexts ranging from rural to urban, and to schools and districts at various levels of maturity in their approach to reporting.

## / KEY STRATEGIES TO STRENGTHEN REPORTING

This toolkit emphasizes five takeaway strategies for local education agencies to consider as they seek to further encourage and support reporting in their unique environment. They are:

1

**Encourage bystanders to report concerns for the wellness and safety of themselves or others.** Promote early intervention and allow local education agencies and communities to provide increased support to students. In addition to threats of school violence, promote the reporting of issues that indicate a student is in need of resources or supports, including bullying, drug use, self-harm, suicidal ideations, and depression.

2

**Make reporting accessible and safe for the reporting community.** Consider and prioritize the privacy of bystanders and those who are the subject of reports. Ensure anonymity or confidentiality for reporting parties to reduce bystander hesitancy. Offer multiple reporting avenues to reduce or remove barriers. Ensure appropriate training for analysts who receive reports, to help bystanders feel more trusting when reporting.

3

**Follow-up on reports and be transparent about the actions taken in response to reported concerns.** Use clear communication to reduce uncertainty about the reporting process and instill trust in students through action taken. When applicable, use two-way communication to further engage with reporting parties. Demonstrate timely response for all methods of reporting. Assess reports based on observed behaviors rather than traits or profiles of students to promote fairness and appropriate outcomes for all students. Share data publicly that shows the impact of your reporting program.

4

**Make reporting a part of daily school life.** Develop effective promotional materials. Make your reporting program easily recognizable as part of your positive school climate. Utilize promotional materials and events throughout the year to remind various audiences about the resources available and the importance of reporting.

5

**Create a positive climate where reporting is valued and respected.** Build and sustain supportive and trusting student-staff relationships. Help students view adults in the schools as trusted individuals. When applicable, foster trusting relationships between student populations and school-based law enforcement or school resource officers (SROs). Strive for a climate where people of all backgrounds feel secure, important, and valued.

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# INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 CONTEXT

The success of school violence prevention requires systems and processes that can identify individuals at risk and intervene effectively. Research shows that early detection and intervention are important not only to protecting the public, but also to providing a chance to intervene and redirect individuals before they negatively affect their own lives and those of others around them (Carlton, 2021). Similarly, when it comes to school settings, violence can be prevented when communities identify warning behaviors and take steps to intervene (NTAC, 2021).

Student wellness intervention and school violence prevention both follow a specific process: awareness, willingness to report, reporting, fielding/triage, and responding (see Figure 1.1). In this process, reporting is an indispensable component. The procedures in place to encourage student reporting appear different across school communities and often reflect factors specific to local contexts. These factors include the number of schools served, the total number of students served, geographical location, and availability of resources. Approaches to support reporting range from models

that focus on the implementation of formal reporting systems, models that emphasize building trust and rapport between students and staff, and models that combine these approaches.

Despite the range of reporting models, there is currently little comparative guidance for schools and districts that addresses the variety of bystander reporting options most relevant to a specific local context. In addition, many students and adults feel reluctant to come forward and report information, even when reporting platforms and programs are available.

**FIGURE 1.1 THE PROCESS FOR SUCCESSFUL STUDENT WELLNESS INTERVENTION AND SCHOOL VIOLENCE PREVENTION**



## BOX 1.1 RESEARCH SUPPORTING THE NEED FOR A STRONG REPORTING PROGRAM

NTAC's *Enhancing School Safety Using a Threat Assessment Model: An Operational Guide for Preventing Targeted School Violence* highlighted the importance of establishing a centralized reporting mechanism as part of a process for identifying concerning behavior, improving student wellness, and preventing school violence. Only once concerning behavior is reported can school communities effectively intervene with appropriate resources and supports for students. The value of school reporting programs is supported by a growing body of research:

### RESEARCH FROM NTAC

- In a 2021 study titled, *Averting Targeted School Violence: A U.S. Secret Service Analysis of Plots Against Schools*, the USSS found that targeted school violence is preventable when communities report concerning behaviors and intervene. In addition to making threats of violence, many plotters had histories of mental health symptoms, substance use, bullying, stressors, and interpersonal grievances.
- In a 2019 publication titled, *Protecting America's Schools: A U.S. Secret Service Analysis of Targeted School Violence*, the USSS found in two-thirds of attacks there was at least one communication (or other observed concerning behavior) by the attacker about his or her intent to attack that was not reported by the bystander who observed it.
- In a 2008 report titled, *Prior Knowledge of Potential School-Based Violence: Information Students Learn May Prevent a Targeted Attack*, the USSS and U.S. Department of Education identified multiple reasons why bystanders did not bring information forward. School climate affected whether bystanders came forward with information related to the threats.

### RESEARCH FROM PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

- A 2021 article in the National Institute of Justice Journal titled *School Safety: Research on Gathering Tips and Addressing Threats* reviews research which suggests that schools should have a systematic and coordinated approach in place to gather and process information on threats, respond appropriately, and document the response.
- In 2019, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration recognized the importance of the Suicide Hotline Improvement Act at, "...a time when the importance of rapid access to crisis intervention and suicide prevention services has never been more critical..." In fact, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention data from 2011 to 2020 reports suicide as the second leading cause of death for those under the age of 18.



Research identified during the literature review phase of this toolkit development indicates that there are many different factors which may contribute to a student's willingness to report their concerns. For instance, older students appear less willing to make reports, relative to their younger counterparts. Readers should consider additional factors, outlined below, when looking to encourage use, or development, of their reporting programs.

**TABLE 1.1 SUMMARY OF FACTORS INFLUENCING STUDENT WILLINGNESS TO REPORT**

	<b>FACTORS</b>	<b>RELATIONSHIP TO REPORTING</b>
<b>STUDENT-LEVEL</b>	<b>Awareness of Security Measures</b>	Schools where students are aware of security measures and practices encourage reporting
	<b>Relationships with School Staff</b>	Students with positive relationships with one or more adult at the school more likely to report
	<b>Performance</b>	Students who perform well in school and achieve high grades more likely to report
	<b>Age</b>	Younger students more likely to report
<b>SCHOOL-LEVEL</b>	<b>Education Around Reporting</b>	Schools that communicate with their reporting community about their reporting and assessment processes encourage reporting
	<b>Transparency Around Reporting Outcomes</b>	Schools that provide transparency about the downstream effects of reporting lessen fears around reporting and encourage reporting
	<b>Support Services for Students</b>	Schools that provide mental health services to promote student social or emotional well-being encourage reporting
	<b>School Collective Identity</b>	Schools with strong collective identities encourage reporting
	<b>Cultural Norms</b>	Schools where reporting is perceived as helping or supporting a peer encourage reporting

The information included in this table draws from the following sources: Crichlow-Ball and Cornell, 2021; Stohlman and Cornell, 2019; Aiello, 2019; Slocum et al., 2017; Hodges et al., 2016; Timmons-Mitchell et al., 2016; Connell et al., 2015; Hollister et al., 2014; Wylie et al., 2010; Pollack et al., 2008; Unnever and Cornell, 2004.



## / 1.2 TOOLKIT GOALS AND INTENDED AUDIENCE

The goals of this toolkit are to engage school and district leaders in thinking about their current reporting processes and to guide them to identify areas where adaptations or additional resources could improve existing efforts to make their students healthier and schools safer. Strategies for encouraging students and other community members to report include strengthening reporting options available to their school community and building more trusting and inclusive school climates.

This toolkit is intended for schools serving all grade levels across geographical contexts and for schools

with existing reporting approaches or who are considering implementing reporting programs. It focuses on strategies to encourage and strengthen reporting, especially among students, and actions that will help schools sustain their success when it comes to supporting students in reporting. This guidance further encourages reporting from other members of a school community, including school staff and parents. While the information within this document focuses on reporting in K-12 settings, some of the information presented may be useful for reporting programs in other sectors.

## / 1.3 METHODS USED TO DEVELOP THIS TOOLKIT

The guidance provided herein is based on two key research activities: a review of the literature focused on bystander reporting and encouraging willingness to report; and more than 30 interviews with school, district, community, and state-level stakeholders involved in K-12 school safety, behavioral threat assessment, and reporting across the United States. The toolkit incorporates best practices—as well as known challenges—highlighted in more than 150 academic articles, guidance documents, and existing reporting programs.

The literature review identifies various reporting models and factors that influence individual willingness to report information. The K-12 school safety stakeholder

interviewees, who represented 13 different school districts or regional agencies across 9 U.S. states that serve all grade levels, described a range of reporting programs adopted by local education agencies and spotlighted common challenges and best practices to support reporting, particularly among students. To highlight the contributions of these stakeholders, this toolkit includes select “Voices from the field” throughout the following sections, emphasizing key points related to encouraging individual willingness to report school safety concerns. Further information regarding the findings from the literature review and geographic details on those interviewed can be found in the References section of this toolkit.

## / 1.4 HOW TO USE THIS TOOLKIT

This toolkit recognizes that schools across the United States must respond to the needs of various student populations and communities. Its purpose is to provide simple guidance to local education agencies as they seek to create or enhance their approach to bystander reporting.

### SECTION 2.0

Describes the various reporting programs decision points that can affect the extent to which students and others come forward with information. Relevant features include attribution (anonymity and confidentiality), accessibility, availability, fielding and receiving reports, and responding to reports. The purpose of this section is to present the several options that are available to local education agencies seeking to strengthen bystander willingness to report in their communities.

### SECTION 3.0

Presents strategies that local education agencies can use to encourage their community to report. Readers should think through their own unique contexts, as well as answers they provide to worksheet questions found in the Worksheet and Checklist section of this toolkit (pages 30-35), to decide which strategies are best suited to improve reporting in their environments. The strategies highlighted in this section include building awareness of reporting and of the resources available to report, building strong relationships across the school community, and gaining buy-in from school leadership and staff to support the effectiveness and longevity of reporting programs.

### SECTION 4.0

Outlines the five summary takeaways for local education agencies and considerations for future steps. It further provides additional resources and tools that may be helpful for the development, enhancement, or verification of local education agency reporting efforts.

### WORKSHEETS

On pages 30-35 of this toolkit, there are worksheets to assist in self-assessment. The purpose of these worksheets is to help readers relate toolkit materials to the specific circumstances at their school or district. We encourage you to use your answers to the worksheet questions to help guide you through the various options and recommendations presented throughout the toolkit that are most relevant to your context.

# STRATEGIES TO STRENGTHEN REPORTING PROGRAMS

This section focuses on how the choices local education agencies make in the design and implementation of a reporting program shape the willingness of bystanders to report behaviors of concern. The choices about factors such as available reporting methods, or who is involved in responding to reports, can affect the willingness of school community members to report concerns about a student's wellness or potential safety issues. Figure 2.1 illustrates these various decision points for local education agencies and the choices available to them.

Some choices (e.g., full anonymity vs. confidentiality of the reporting party) might increase willingness to report safety concerns but may make it more difficult to evaluate or act on those reports. In all approaches, encouraging reporting is essential to ensuring that school and community resources can reach the students in need of them. This section of the toolkit offers recommendations and strategies local education agencies can use when implementing new reporting protocols or strengthening existing ones.

**FIGURE 2.1 REPORTING PROGRAM DECISION POINTS FOR CONSIDERATION**



## BOX 2.1 WHAT DO STUDENTS REPORT

Current approaches to reporting in K-12 schools in the United States encourage students and the broader reporting community to report information related to wellness and youth safety. Reports often involve topics related to self-harm or harm to others, bullying, suicide, tobacco or narcotics use, depression, and explicit or implicit threats of violence. Many local education agencies encourage members of their reporting community to report anything that makes them feel worried or uncomfortable. Local education agencies who seek to strengthen the reporting culture in their community should consider what additional concerns, behaviors, or situations might warrant reporting in their contexts. Reviewing past trends in school crime and violence and engaging in conversations with school mental health professionals, teachers, and other school staff can help to identify additional examples of concerns that might be reported to a program.

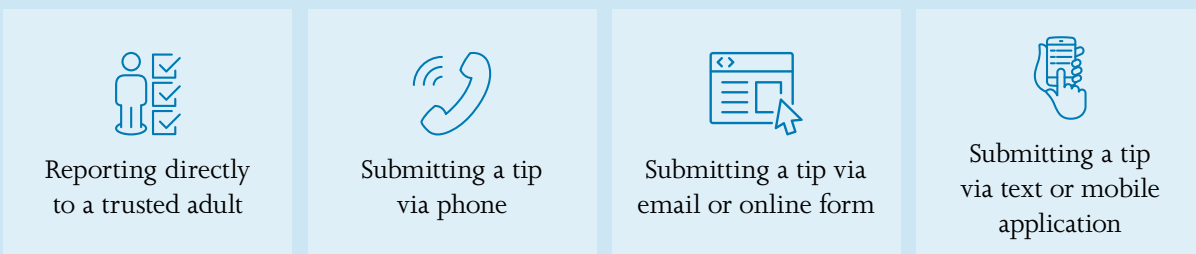
## / 2.1 OFFER MULTIPLE REPORTING METHODS TO IMPROVE ACCESSIBILITY

This strategy might be a priority for contexts in which students and others do not currently report threats or other concerns related to school safety and student wellness.

Approaches that offer the option to report threats and other concerns via multiple methods can encourage reporting and help support individuals with different reporting preferences across varying contexts.

There are several options that local education agencies can choose from for reporting methods: reporting to a trusted adult; submitting a tip via phone; reporting via email or online form; or reporting via text or mobile application.

### FIGURE 2.2 HOW CAN STUDENTS REPORT?



## VOICES FROM THE FIELD

“You must have [multiple methods for reporting]. It’s one of the top best practices when it comes to school security.”

- District staff, March 2022

In general, offering multiple methods of reporting can increase accessibility (Moore et al., 2022) and the reporting methods that local education agencies make available to their reporting community should be appropriate for all members of their community. For example, students may be visually or hearing impaired or have other disabilities that make certain reporting systems less accessible. Phone tip lines are often inaccessible to those with hearing impairments and mobile applications may impose barriers to those with visual impairments. Offering multiple reporting methods that students and others can access adds significant value in such cases and can be implemented alongside each other. Some students may feel more

comfortable reporting their concerns directly to adults rather than through a mobile application or tip line, and some schools might perceive in-person communication between students and school staff as sufficient to keep their school safe. This model may be more appropriate for small districts or schools, where students feel comfortable going to a teacher they know well, than in larger school or districts. Moreover, some school communities may be forced to rely on in-person communication due to limitations on staff and funding. In these cases, it is vital that school staff are trained on where and how to pass reports they receive directly from students or others, and that structured protocols for responding to reports are in place.

## GRANT AND FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

The Federal School Safety Clearinghouse has developed a Grants Finder Tool with easy-to-use features to assist schools and districts in finding funding opportunities, no matter their level of expertise or familiarity with federal grant programs.

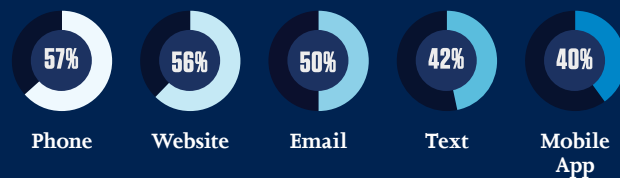
For more information, visit [SchoolSafety.gov](https://www.schoolsafety.gov).

### BOX 2.2 COMMON REPORTING METHODS IN MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOLS

In a 2019 survey fielded to a random sample of 4,120 public middle and high schools, researchers from RTI International found that most schools with reporting systems offered multiple options for submission. The most common report submission options were via phone (57%), website (56%), and email (50%). A lesser proportion of schools with reporting systems had text (42%) and mobile app (40%) options.

In this same survey, almost all schools with reporting systems offered anonymous and/or confidential reporting. Nearly half of the reporting systems offered only anonymous reporting (47%); a further 39 percent offered anonymous or confidential reporting and 8 percent offered only confidential reporting. (Planty et al., 2021).

#### TYPE OF REPORTING



#### OPTION FOR REPORTING



## VOICES FROM THE FIELD

“[The] biggest challenge is finding the resources to respond to all the tips. It takes time to coordinate... But the return on investment for this program is life. It’s big.”

- District staff, March 2022

## / 2.2 SET OPERATING HOURS THAT IMPROVE AVAILABILITY

This strategy might be a priority for contexts in which students and others report threats or other concerns through reporting systems.

Since reports of concerning or threatening behavior are not limited to school hours, some reporting systems enable reporting outside of school hours and are responsive 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. In the 2021 study of averted school attack plots, NTAC found that some plots were reported over the weekend and that many were reported within 0-2 days of the planned day of attack (NTAC, 2021). With these findings in mind, protocols to assess incoming reports should be in place 24/7 when this is feasible.

Pending available funding, necessary approvals, and other context-specific requirements, a program that is available 24/7 may need to be operated by a third party, at least part of the time (e.g., outside of school hours), to reduce demands on school staff. These programs should emphasize to individuals that their concerns will be met with a timely response. Other programs are staffed and monitored only during certain parts of the day and on certain days of the week, typically during school hours. Such programs emphasize to reporting community members that they should call 911 when emergencies occur outside of school hours.

## CONFIDENTIAL VS. ANONYMOUS REPORTING

An important consideration when implementing a reporting system is whether to offer an option for anonymous or confidential reporting.

When reports are taken anonymously, individuals can submit reports without providing any information that could be used to identify them, reducing fear of potential retaliation. However, anonymous reports may be traced in the event of an imminent threat or a malicious false report. Alternatively, a confidential reporting option collects information about the reporting individual, but their identity is not revealed to anyone outside of the reporting app. Confidential reports allow trained analysts to follow up with the reporter and collect any remaining information that may be necessary to address a concern.

From *School Tip Line Toolkit: A Blueprint for Implementation and Sustainability*

## VOICES FROM THE FIELD

“[a] reporting system doesn’t mean much if you don’t have a follow up process.”

- District staff, March 2022

### / 2.3 CONSIDER AN ANONYMOUS OR CONFIDENTIAL REPORTING OPTION

This strategy might be a priority for contexts in which students and others in the reporting community fear retaliation after reporting.

Anonymous and confidential reporting options can broaden the appeal of reporting, especially for students who are concerned about being identified and ostracized by their peers after reporting. Research finds that the fear of being ostracized, or experiencing other forms of retaliation, is a significant barrier to reporting. When students view reporting as “snitching,” they are discouraged from coming forward with their concerns (Slocum et al., 2017). Reporting anonymously or confidentially ensures that an individual’s identity will not be revealed when they choose to come forward with information, which helps to prevent a student from being retaliated against for reporting. The option to report anonymously or in a confidential manner can therefore be a significant benefit of student reporting systems, particularly for students who are in middle and high school.

In areas where the implementation of formal reporting systems or other reporting methods are not an option, local education agencies may decide to place “comment boxes” throughout the school, allowing students to discreetly report anonymous concerns. This method is not suggested in place of other practices that have been shown to be more effective. If local education agencies utilize this approach or similar practices, reports submitted to such boxes must be reviewed and acted upon in a consistent and timely manner. Otherwise, these boxes may not increase safety, even if they are successful in increasing reporting. This demonstrates the potential tension between efforts to improve reporting and the performance of other steps of the broader school safety system.

There are important tradeoffs to consider regarding anonymity. For example, anonymous reports might limit

the effectiveness of response if school administrators and other parties do not know who to engage for additional information. Anonymous online forms or mobile application-based reporting programs can integrate features to address this potential drawback by encouraging reporting individuals to provide as much information as possible. This can be accomplished through either a live two-way chat feature where individuals can interact directly with a trained analyst while remaining anonymous, or through additional text fields where users can be prompted to provide more specific details about their concern. Text fields can ask about the type of incident being reported, time and location of a potential incident, name of individual(s) involved, and other details to simulate live prompting by a trained analyst without forfeiting anonymity. Some programs can allow the upload of images or screenshots as necessary.

Unfortunately, anonymity can invite false or prank reports, which can contribute to an increase in workload for trained analysts. In some cases, false reports threaten the sustainability of a program. Many state-level reporting programs across the country specify how they will handle such situations; in most cases, programs must obtain a court order to trace false submissions made with the intent to harm or harass someone else. Part of the training provided to students regarding what and how to report should additionally focus on the consequences of intentionally submitting false or prank reports.

An alternative to anonymity is to provide individuals the option to report confidentially. In this case, someone who reports information through a reporting system or directly to a staff person will reveal their identity, though their identity is kept private by the program



or person receiving the report. This method further supports the importance of sustaining strong trusting relationships between students and staff if, for example,

students have concerns about adults keeping their information confidential.

## / 2.4 FIELD REPORTS IN A TIMELY AND TRANSPARENT MANNER

This strategy might be a priority for contexts in which students or others in the reporting community fear that their reports are not being taken seriously.

For all reporting methods, clear protocols for receiving reports, communicating with reporting individuals, and triaging reports in a timely manner are necessary to increase the likelihood of an efficient response. Research shows that students are more likely to report threats and concerning behavior when they believe that the school will take their information seriously and provide a timely response (Unnever and Cornell, 2004; Pollack et al., 2008).

There are several ways for local education agencies to operate reporting systems and respond to reports. Some state-based school safety reporting programs, such as Safe2Tell Colorado, Safe Schools Maryland, and Ok2Say Michigan, engage analysts from different state-level agencies (e.g., public safety departments, emergency management agencies, state highway patrols, state information analysis centers, state health and human services agencies) to field incoming reports. Other state-level programs, such as Safe2Help Nebraska, contract non-governmental agencies specializing in crisis counseling to operate school safety reporting systems. In another model, some states contract specialized third-party programs that provide staff and technology resources to support response. Each analyst receives specialized training as a crisis counselor or other crisis intervention expert, so that they can effectively communicate with individuals submitting a report. Trained analysts then send relevant information to the affected districts, schools, and any other parties included in a response protocol such as local law enforcement.

Some programs maintain systems to help schools or districts track and manage their response efforts. For example, the Say Something Anonymous Reporting System, managed by Sandy Hook Promise, provides any state, district, or school that employs the system with trained analysts who dialogue in real time with individuals submitting a report, whether via phone

or online chat. These trained analysts then triage, or examine and evaluate, each report to meet school or district protocols specifying who should receive specific information. With other reporting systems, such as AnonymousAlerts, a school administrator engages directly with the individual submitting a report and subsequently triages that information to a team as determined by district protocols. Many of these features benefit reporting programs by supporting individuals during the submission of a report and building credibility that reports will be handled appropriately.

The role of law enforcement should be considered when thinking about protocols for receiving and triaging reports. In NTAC's *Enhancing School Safety Using a Threat Assessment Model: An Operational Guide for Preventing Targeted School Violence*, NTAC recommends determining the threshold for law enforcement involvement during the development of a targeted violence prevention program. Schools will want to establish policies and protocols that specify which scenarios require law enforcement involvement (e.g., violence, threats, weapons) and which do not (e.g., bullying, depression, self-harm). Some state statutes related to behavioral threat assessment and reporting mandate that all incoming reports are forwarded to local law enforcement personnel, in addition to relevant district and school personnel. In other states, district- and or school-level personnel receive notification of a report, but information is only relayed to local law enforcement in the case of life-safety emergencies. Other states only engage law enforcement as a last resort, after contacting a reported student's parents and school personnel. As noted previously in this toolkit, it is often difficult for school staff to receive reports and respond to emergencies after school hours. Having law enforcement personnel on call outside of school hours to either operate a reporting system and/or receive information may help fill this gap and offer availability for a 24/7 response.

It is important to recognize that not everyone submitting a report, including students, will be comfortable calling 911 or speaking directly with law enforcement in the event of a crisis or emergency. In some contexts, local education agencies may look to avoid perceptions that reporting programs are tied directly to law enforcement. As such, certain local- and state-level school safety

reporting systems have trained third-party contractors to answer incoming reports. When deciding who is most appropriate to answer a report, local education agencies should consider their unique contexts and whether they will require law enforcement support to field and/or triage reports.

## MULTIDISCIPLINARY BEHAVIORAL THREAT ASSESSMENT TEAMS FOR TRIAGE AND ASSESSMENT

NTAC stresses the importance of establishing a multidisciplinary behavioral threat assessment team in schools to process the cases that may be initiated in response to a report (NTAC, 2018). Behavioral threat assessment (BTA) is a proactive approach to identify, assess, and provide appropriate interventions and resources for students who display behavior that elicits concern for the safety of themselves or others. As research has found that there is no one profile of a student attacker, a BTA focuses on a student's observed behaviors, not their traits or profile (NTAC, 2019). A BTA is not a criminal investigation, nor is it a disciplinary process. Instead, a BTA focuses on gathering and assessing information about a student's behaviors in full context to ensure that they receive appropriate support, all as a means of proactively preventing unwanted outcomes.

Because making decisions about reports regarding potential safety issues is complex and challenging, involving professionals from many different fields and perspectives is vital to the BTA process. Designated multidisciplinary behavioral threat assessment teams often include at least one school administrator, a school counselor, a teacher, a school psychologist, and a school resource officer (NTAC, 2018). These multidisciplinary teams can be school- or district-based, and different states have varying requirements or guidance about the composition of such teams.

### / 2.5 RESPOND TO REPORTS EFFICIENTLY, FAIRLY, AND TRANSPARENTLY

This strategy might be a priority for situations in which students or others in the reporting community fear the consequences of reporting, or do not believe that reporting can have a positive impact on school safety.

The actions that local education agencies and relevant partners take after they receive information from a report, as well as consistency in those actions, demonstrates accountability and builds credibility with students. In school contexts, students pay attention to the actions taken in response to their reports. Schools can encourage student

reporting by providing clear and transparent information about their response to reports.

Investigating and responding to reports takes time, requires resources, and places demands on school staff.<sup>1</sup> To help meet these challenges, NTAC emphasizes the importance of establishing a multidisciplinary behavioral

1. This toolkit does not provide guidance on how local education agencies might conduct a cost-benefit analysis of school safety reporting systems or other approaches to reporting. For an overview of the costs associated with school safety reporting systems, as well as guidance around monetizing the benefits of a reporting systems, refer to Planty et al. (2021).

## VOICES FROM THE FIELD

“The most critical thing for students to come forward is the relationships that they have with the people at the school, and confidence that if they tell a teacher about their worries, they trust it is going to be handled the right way. For [students], it’s less about how things are messaged than about how they see the school react.”

- City-level representative, January 2022

“It is a supportive process available to all students... [we] stress equity and the fact that [threat assessment] meetings are set up to understand and support [students], not punish.”

- District staff, February 2022

threat assessment team in schools to identify, assess, and manage cases in response to reports (NTAC, 2018). Existing guidance on behavioral threat assessment in schools outlines several best practices related to following up on reports. These include efficiently managing and processing reports, being responsive, gathering information, assessing information in the context of an individual’s life, and being prepared to provide appropriate interventions based on the assessment (Cornell, 2011; NTAC, 2018; Planty et al., 2020; CSSRC 2020; Hollister, et al., 2014).

The extent to which law enforcement involvement in the threat assessment process encourages reporting is heavily context-dependent and can vary based on multiple factors. While law enforcement may often become involved in responding to reports when situations involve criminal activity or life-safety events, schools and districts vary in how law enforcement personnel are involved in following up to non-life-threatening reports. Research suggests that law enforcement officers assigned to schools, such as SROs, can play a unique role in supporting students and making them feel safer at school when they gain the trust of students (Sulkowski, 2011; Hollister et al., 2014). Law enforcement assigned to schools should receive training on school-specific skills that enables them to better relate to and engage students. School-specific skills on which SROs receive training

include building positive relationships with students and school staff, and identifying and responding to mental health needs, among other topics (NASRO, 2022).<sup>1</sup> Students, as well as school staff, are more likely to view SROs as part of the school’s community than local law enforcement officers who are not regularly present on a campus. SRO positions should be established as a trusted component of a safe and positive school climate, not as a means of administering discipline.

In certain contexts, however, students may be reluctant to report information if they perceive the process as requiring law enforcement or uniformed personnel involvement. These contrasting perceptions among audiences stress the importance of taking a multidisciplinary approach that involves individuals from a wide range of professional backgrounds in response to reports. Being transparent about the role of law enforcement can help in situations where an organization may want to avoid perceptions that reporting automatically links a student’s behavior to crime or that the response will be entirely law enforcement driven.

Beyond behavioral threat assessment teams, other school-based multi-disciplinary teams can help respond to the wide variety of reports that are collected by reporting programs, most of which do not involve a

1. See National Association of Resource Officers (NASRO). (n.d.). *Training Courses*. As of June 2, 2022: <https://www.nasro.org/training/training-courses/>

risk of violent acts. These other multi-disciplinary teams can help coordinate service delivery, manage criminal justice diversion programming, and respond to crime and victimization in vulnerable populations (Iachini, et al., 2013; Ervin et al., 2022; Carlson, et al., 2020; Mazerolle, et al., 2021).

Additionally, local education agencies can consider sharing annual and other periodic reports with the reporting community to further increase transparency around critical issues, such as when information is shared with law enforcement and when situations are

left exclusively to school administrators to manage. Sharing high-level information about response actions taken with the reporting community can help to support both the perceived fairness of a program across different groups within the student population, and the perceived effectiveness of a program. This toolkit does not provide specific guidance on who should respond to information provided through a reporting system; these decisions are best left to school- and district-level personnel who have intimate knowledge of their local contexts.

**TABLE 2.1 SAMPLE FEATURES OF STATE-LEVEL SCHOOL SAFETY REPORTING SYSTEMS**

	<b>CO</b>	<b>MD</b>	<b>MI</b>	<b>OR</b>	<b>PA</b>
<b>PROGRAM NAME</b>	Safe2Tell	Safe Schools Maryland	OK2SAY	SafeOregon	Safe2Say
<b>REPORTS RECEIVED 2019-2020 SY</b>	20,822	439	3,743	2,001	23,745
<b>REPORTS RECEIVED BY REPORTING PLATFORM</b>	Mobile: 52% Phone: 30% Web: 18%	Mobile: 23% Phone: 28% Web: 49%	Information not available	Mobile: 13% Phone: 8% Web: 68%	Mobile: 79% Phone: 3% Web: 18%
<b>REPORT RECIPIENTS</b>	CO Information Analysis Center trained analysts	MD Emergency Management Agency trained analysts	Trained OK2SAY technicians	Trained technicians from OR State Police	PA Office of Attorney General trained analysts
<b>REPORT TRIAGE</b>	School admin; Local law enforcement	District or school admin; 911 dispatch for emergencies	School admin; Local law enforcement for life-safety reports	School admin; Local law enforcement for life-safety reports	District or school admin; 911 dispatch for life-safety reports

Source: Colorado Office of the Attorney General, 2020; Maryland Center for School Safety, 2020; Pennsylvania Office of the Attorney General, 2021. OK2SAY, 2020; SafeOregon, 2020.

# STRATEGIES TO ENCOURAGE COMMUNITY REPORTING

There is no single solution when it comes to supporting individuals seeking to report concerning behaviors, and options that work well in one school setting may not be suitable for other settings. Nevertheless, literature on reporting and practices implemented by K-12 school safety stakeholders spotlight key strategies to encourage reporting (see e.g., Eliot et al., 2010; Hodges et al., 2016; Stohlman and Cornell, 2019). When reading through the following strategies, consider the unique environment and needs of your school or district and identify which strategies you might prioritize to further support reporting in your school community. The Worksheet and Checklist section of this toolkit (pages 30-35) can guide you through this process.

## 3.1 ORGANIZE TRAINING AND OUTREACH EFFORTS TO BUILD AWARENESS AROUND REPORTING AND THE WAYS TO REPORT INFORMATION

This strategy might be a priority for contexts in which students or others in the reporting community do not recognize concerning behaviors and other warning signs that might indicate a threat to student wellness or school safety, or contexts in which individuals do not know how to report.

For reporting programs to be a useful tool for intervention and prevention in K-12 schools, students and other members of a reporting community need to be aware of the importance of reporting, their role in reporting, what to report, and any resources that are available when it comes to reporting threats and other concerns. There are a variety of strategies that local education agencies can adopt to reach students and other members of their reporting community in this regard. These can include formal trainings designed for various groups, general marketing efforts, and initiatives that engage individual students, student clubs, groups, or teams to spread the message about reporting. These

efforts ultimately provide education and knowledge about a variety of topics related to reporting, starting with the importance and impact of reporting, and expanding to cover specifics about what to report, how to report, and what happens once a report is submitted. Training can help to reduce confusion or stigma around reporting and increase knowledge around what types of behaviors or problems should be reported and what will happen after a community member submits a report (Stueve et al., 2006; Stohlman & Cornell, 2019; Henckel, 2019; Hollister et al., 2014; Haner et al., 2021; Pollack et al., 2008; Eliot et al., 2010).

### TRAINING EFFORTS

Local education agencies can design and implement training programs to increase awareness of reporting and to further encourage individuals to report. Training can be integrated into initiatives that schools already plan for, such as student orientations and new student programs; family orientation and back-to-school nights; all-school assemblies; and efforts to address related behaviors of concern such as bullying, substance abuse, and mental health crises.

Local education agencies should take advantage of pre-made trainings and resources where possible, but there is value in tailoring training and outreach materials to make them directly relevant to specific school contexts. If districts or schools receive pre-made training materials, such as videos or vignettes provided by private reporting systems or state-implemented programs, they can modify these materials to include voiceovers by school staff, specific references to their

local school or district, or remove content that may not be suitable for students in lower grade levels. Training programs that are flexible and tailor the training length and content based on grade-level and student needs are often the most effective. Examples and scenarios can also be modified to portray different types of situations and actions worthy of reporting, show what reporting looks like across students of different ages, or depict different reporting modes (e.g., reports made via phone, an online form, or through a mobile application). Trainings should depict successful instances of reporting, describe the importance of reporting, and convey information about the steps involved in reporting.

Training programs can take various forms. Some might occur during scheduled student assemblies via PowerPoint presentation. Other approaches can include

distributing flyers about a reporting program to students and then discussing the content and messaging included on the flyers during homeroom or in other classroom contexts. Schools can also provide trainings via school-wide emails, newsletters, and district and school websites. Reporting programs might post short trainings to their social media accounts to allow for broad viewership. Many state-level reporting programs, such as Safe2Tell Colorado, SeeTellNow (Idaho), Safe2Help Illinois, and SaferMontana, make short videos, tutorials, toolkits, flyers, and other training materials directly available to local education agencies on their websites or by request.

Trainings geared towards adult members of the school community are equally as important to improving reporting and to prevention. Adults need to be aware

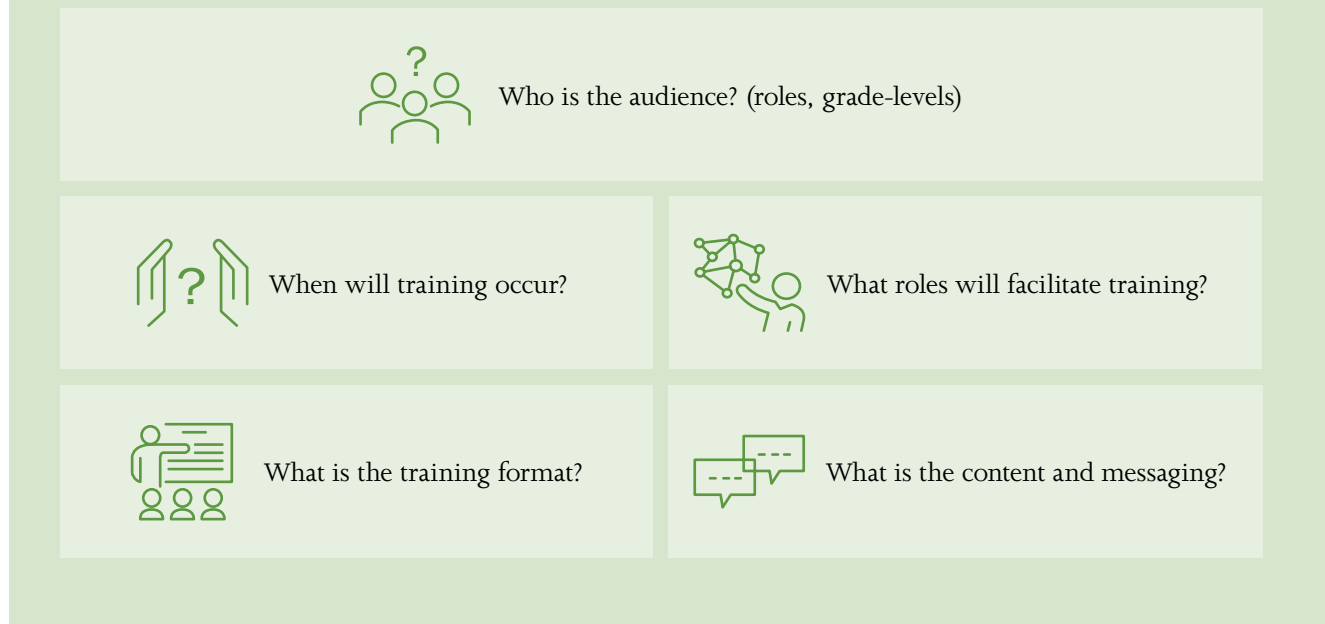
### BOX 3.1 INTEGRATING PEER-TO-PEER OUTREACH TO ENCOURAGE REPORTING

Engaging students to assist with outreach efforts can help to spread the word about reporting and encourage reporting by individuals who may otherwise be hesitant to do so. Students receive information differently when they hear it from a peer, as opposed to an adult. Currently, multiple state-level school reporting programs implement student-led outreach efforts to increase knowledge around reporting. Some solicit input from student focus groups to inform decision-making around reporting or form student ambassador programs through which high school students can provide feedback on what makes for effective marketing and social media campaigns targeting youth. Some local education agencies in the United States engage existing student clubs to spread the word about reporting to their peers and lead discussions on various school safety topics.

of the available reporting resources, their role in the reporting process, and how to support students in coming forward with information. Training for school leadership and staff is especially critical to building buy-in for a reporting program and is necessary to build and maintain a robust culture of reporting at a school. In addition to the same core training topics delivered to students, it is important for training directed at school staff to address specific protocols related to reporting, highlighting expectations, roles, and responsibilities of staff. Moreover, if district or school staff are involved in receiving reports, they should receive training that teaches them how to interact with individuals submitting a report and specifies where they should

forward specific information. School and district staff should be familiar with any relevant privacy protocols that may dictate when and to how they should forward specific information. Additional training topics include training that focuses on how to interpret the meaning of commonly used slang or emojis, which students might include in a report. Finally, training is an opportunity to increase visibility of the key staff involved in responding to reports such as administrators, SROs, school based mental health practitioners, or others; these individuals can help lead or facilitate trainings for students.

## FIGURE 3.1 TRAINING CONSIDERATIONS



### BOX 3.1 REPORTING EXAMPLES

- A high school student shared with friends that he felt depressed and had thoughts of suicide. One friend submitted a report to their state’s anonymous tip line with their concerns. School counselors responded to the report and interviewed the student the following morning. Counselors determined that the student was a danger to himself and sent him to the hospital for an evaluation. After receiving mental health treatment, the student was able to overcome his depression. He credits the tip line with saving his life.
- A middle school student was anonymously reported to her state tip line for self-harm. That night, police officers conducted a safety check on the student. She was sent to the emergency room and subsequently transferred to an inpatient behavioral health facility. There, she received mental health treatment, and she continued with outpatient therapy after her release. The supports she received helped her build coping skills and greatly improved her mental health.
- A high school student shared with a trusted adult their concerns about two students who were planning to carry out an attack at their school following the upcoming winter break. The adult reached out to the SRO and provided a description of the concern. The tip was acted upon within hours, leading to a joint investigation by school administration and law enforcement. Authorities found credible evidence of a plot to carry out the attack at one student’s home, including plans to secure weapons. Following the investigation, the students were arrested.



## PROMOTIONAL EFFORTS

Local education agencies can provide school communities with visual displays about what to report and how to report, whether or not they have a formal reporting system in place. Basic marketing is a quick and often cost-efficient way to promote a reporting program. Effective promotional tools used by schools across the country vary widely but often include posters that prominently display the name of the reporting program and ways to report such as the associated phone numbers, websites, and QR code linking to the associated mobile application. These details are commonly posted on pens, water bottles, and lanyards distributed to students and teachers, and on the backs of staff and student identification cards. In communities

with large numbers of non-English speakers, these marketing materials should be available in multiple languages.

Additionally, local education agencies can send out information about their reporting program via school-wide emails and regular newsletters, and post details prominently on district and school websites. States, districts, and schools also design social media campaigns to help spread the word about reporting and advertise specific programs at major school events such as student assemblies, back-to-school nights, or parent-teacher association meetings. Several states make marketing materials, such as posters, available at no cost to local education agencies.

### VOICES FROM THE FIELD

“Initially, we visited every classroom; it was a big lift. The program is now so well-known in this district that even elementary school kids know about it.”

- District staff, March 2022

“We market on everything we can think of... We made it a part of our culture for so many years, even parents remember it from when they were in school.”


- District staff, March 2022

### BOX 3.2 THE TARGET AUDIENCE FOR MARKETING?

A school’s reporting community can include the following people, all of whom may observe concerning behavior and should be considered in marketing efforts:

- Students
- Teachers
- School support staff such as school counselors, social workers, SROs and other security staff, nurses, etc.
- Athletic team coaches
- Administrators
- Non-instructional staff, such as paraprofessionals, cafeteria staff, facilities managers, bus drivers, etc.
- Afterschool staff such as club leads or other extracurricular heads
- Parents and other family members
- Other individuals from the broader community such as local business owners, etc.

FIGURE 3.2 SAMPLE MARKETING POSTER FOR STATE REPORTING SYSTEM



Source: Colorado Office of the Attorney General

- ✓ Prominent visual display of what types of problems can be reported
- ✓ Short, recognizable name of program
- ✓ Reminder of anonymous reporting option, 24/7 availability
- ✓ Visible phone number & web address
- ✓ QR code for quick access to mobile application
- ✓ Where mobile application is available for download

## 3.2 BUILD A POSITIVE SCHOOL CLIMATE BY FOSTERING TRUST AND POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS

This strategy might be a priority for contexts in which school leaders speculate students and others are hesitant to report their concerns related to student wellness and safety.

Establishing rapport between students and school staff is critical to building a trusting school environment where students and other members of the reporting community feel included and comfortable coming forward with information. This is true regardless of the approach to reporting in place at a school or across a district. In

general, individuals feel more empowered to report when they believe they are part of a larger community. Research demonstrates that the level of trust between students and school staff influences the willingness of students to report threats, where students who lack positive relationships with their teachers and

other adults at school are less likely to report threats than students that have such relationships (Pollack et al., 2008; Hollister et al., 2014). Similarly, students with lower positive feelings toward their school safety system, including campus police or their SRO, are less likely to report threats than students with stronger positive feelings (Pollack et al., 2008; Hollister et al., 2014). School and district leaders should assess relationships within their schools and other aspects of school climate, such as safety, sense of belonging, and perceptions of respect vs. inequitable or disciplinary actions, to identify potential areas in need of improvement.

Schools where students have strong relationships with teachers and perceive their teachers as able to help them have higher reporting rates. Positive relationships accrue through repeated student-teacher interactions, familiarity between students and teachers, and teachers making themselves accessible to students (Yablon, 2010; 2020). There are many ways to increase visibility and accessibility of school staff. Teachers, administrators,

and other school personnel can actively engage with groups of students during non-instructional times such as school arrival and dismissal, or during lunch. They can attend sporting events, musical performances, and other extra-curricular activities. In schools and districts with SROs or a school police force, leadership can help to increase the visibility of school law enforcement personnel by engaging them to present and discuss school safety topics with students during class, including reporting. When school staff are visible and accessible to students, they become trusted adults to whom students feel comfortable reporting.

These strategies can be especially valuable in contexts where communities seek to identify ways of establishing, building, or rebuilding levels of trust with law enforcement. Local education agencies should work together with law enforcement and other key stakeholders to identify areas of partnership and ways of sharing resources to advance mutual goals.

## VOICES FROM THE FIELD

“You can’t have an effective [reporting] program with an app alone, you must live it in the climate and culture. And if you don’t respond in a timely manner, kids won’t believe and trust you.”

- District staff, March 2022

“We try to make sure that we invest, particularly at the elementary level, in a trusting and supportive climate and culture... If you build a culture and climate where people feel it’s safe to talk about health and other needs, and it’s not considered snitching or weakness, reporting will happen naturally.”

- District staff, March 2022

# TAKEAWAYS AND LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Bystander reporting is critical to the prevention of violence in K-12 schools and, more broadly, the social and emotional wellness of K-12 students. Successful reporting is achieved through strong cultures of trust and supportive relationships between students and school staff, and the integration of support systems, such as school safety reporting programs, that reduce barriers to reporting for students and other members of the reporting community. This toolkit offers several strategies for local education agencies to consider as they seek to further encourage and support reporting in their contexts. In summary, it emphasizes five major takeaways for local education agencies:

## 1. ENCOURAGE BYSTANDERS TO REPORT CONCERNS FOR THE WELLNESS AND SAFETY OF THEMSELVES OR OTHERS.

Data from existing reporting programs (e.g., Safe2Tell Colorado, OK2SAY Michigan) reveal that, while students often report threats of school violence, they also frequently report concerns involving bullying, drug use, self-harm, suicidal ideations, and depression. Promoting reporting of a broad range of wellness and safety issues promotes early intervention and allows local education agencies and communities to provide students with increased individual supports.

## 2. MAKE REPORTING ACCESSIBLE AND SAFE FOR YOUR REPORTING COMMUNITY.

Providing a mode for students and others to anonymously or confidentially report threats and other school safety concerns can reduce fears of being ostracized for reporting. Reporting platforms that cater to today's student population—such as online forms and mobile applications—are likely to reduce barriers to reporting. Finally, those who will answer the reports should be trained to interact with youth and adults in crisis to help these individuals feel more comfortable coming forward with information.

## 3. FOLLOW-UP ON REPORTS AND BE TRANSPARENT ABOUT THE ACTIONS TAKEN IN RESPONSE TO REPORTED CONCERNS.

Communication works to ease student fears about reporting and builds confidence that school staff take student concerns seriously. To best establish a program's credibility among the reporting community, timely and appropriate follow-up should be taken whether the reports go through a formal reporting system or directly to a trusted adult. Assessment and management of reports should focus on observed behaviors rather than traits and profiles of students to promote fairness and intended outcomes for all students. Further, collecting and publishing data about reporting at the school or district level can demonstrate the impact of a program and the seriousness with which reports are taken.

#### **4. MAKE REPORTING A PART OF DAILY SCHOOL LIFE.**

Prominently displayed posters and the distribution of promotional materials like pens, water bottles, and lanyards help to make a reporting program easily recognizable to students and other members of a school's reporting community. Short training videos and other presentations delivered throughout the school year remind students about the resources available to them, and of the importance of reporting for improving student wellness and school safety.

#### **5. CREATE A CLIMATE WHERE REPORTING IS VALUED AND RESPECTED BY MAINTAINING SUPPORTIVE STUDENT-STAFF RELATIONSHIPS ACROSS THE ENTIRE SCHOOL COMMUNITY.**

Students should see the adults with whom they have daily interactions at school, including teachers, administrators, and other staff, as trusted individuals they can go to with concerns. If law enforcement is present on campus, these efforts should extend to fostering trusting relationships between the student population and school police officers or SROs. Schools should strive for a climate where people of all backgrounds feel secure, important, and valued.

This toolkit provides strategies to address one piece of the overall school safety system – the willingness of bystanders to report behaviors of concern. For local education agencies with well-established reporting systems, your next steps could be to apply these strategies to increase the potential for success. For schools with less-established reporting programs or without a current program in place, this resource is just one of a larger set of tools to draw on while designing a new reporting program or strengthening the capabilities that you already have in place.

Success requires a system is able to act rapidly and effectively to intervene in response to potential concerns about student wellness and safety. As mentioned throughout this toolkit, and in the following Additional Resources section, it is important to utilize other resources to support the development of reporting tools and programs, develop and manage the fielding and triage of reports, and make informed decisions around how to assess reports and respond to reported concerns.

# ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security does not endorse any person, product, service, or enterprise. References to specific agencies, companies, products, or services therefore should not be considered an endorsement by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. Rather, the references are illustrations to supplement discussion of the issues. The Internet references cited in this publication were valid as of the date of this publication.

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## STATE REPORTING PROGRAMS

STATE	PROGRAM NAME	STATE	PROGRAM NAME
Colorado	<a href="#">Safe2Tell Colorado</a>	Nebraska	<a href="#">Safe2Help Nebraska</a>
Florida	<a href="#">FortifyFL</a>	Nevada	<a href="#">Safe Voice Nevada</a>
Georgia	<a href="#">School Safety Hotline</a>	North Carolina	<a href="#">Say Something Anonymous Reporting System</a>
Idaho	<a href="#">See Tell Now!</a>	Ohio	<a href="#">Safer Ohio School Tip Line</a>
Illinois	<a href="#">Safe2Help Illinois</a>	Oklahoma	<a href="#">Oklahoma School Security Institute Tipline</a>
Iowa	<a href="#">Safe + Sound Iowa</a>	Oregon	<a href="#">SafeOregon</a>
Kansas	<a href="#">School Safety Hotline</a>	Pennsylvania	<a href="#">Safe2Say PA</a>
Kentucky	<a href="#">Safety Tipline Online Prevention (STOP) and Kentucky Safe Schools</a>	Tennessee	<a href="#">SafeTN</a>
Louisiana	<a href="#">Safe Schools Louisiana</a>	Texas	<a href="#">iWatchTexas School Safety</a>
Maryland	<a href="#">Safe Schools Maryland</a>	Utah	<a href="#">SafeUT</a>
Michigan	<a href="#">Ok2Say</a>	Vermont	<a href="#">Safe4VT</a>
Minnesota	<a href="#">See It, Say It, Send It</a>	West Virginia	<a href="#">Safe Schools Helpline</a>
Mississippi	<a href="#">Stay Safe Hotline</a>	Wisconsin	<a href="#">Speak Up, Speak Out WI</a>
Missouri	<a href="#">Courage2Report Missouri</a>	Wyoming	<a href="#">Safe2Tell Wyoming</a>
Montana	<a href="#">SaferMontana</a>		





## WORKSHEETS AND CHECKLISTS

The following worksheets and checklists are provided to assist in self-assessment and help readers relate toolkit materials to the specific circumstances at their school or district. We encourage you to use your answers to the worksheet questions to help guide you through the various options and recommendations throughout the toolkit that are most relevant to your context.

# ASSESSING THE STRENGTH OF YOUR SCHOOL OR DISTRICT'S REPORTING CULTURE

The starting point for any school safety effort that seeks to encourage and facilitate reporting of threatening and other concerning behaviors should be an accurate assessment of the strength of your school or district's reporting culture. **Think about the following questions:**

	QUESTIONS	YES	NO
1	<p>Are you concerned that, if a member of the school community became aware of a concerning or threatening behavior, they:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– would not <b>be aware that they should report that information?</b></li> <li>– would not <b>know how to report</b> the information?</li> <li>– would not <b>report</b> the information?</li> </ul>		
2	<p>Are you concerned that, if a member of the school community attempted to report information about concerning or threatening behavior, the <b>information would not make it to the appropriate people and agencies</b> required to act rapidly on that information?</p>		
3	<p>Does your <b>school culture and the relationships that students have with teachers</b>, administrators, and other staff create barriers to reporting concerns to school safety?</p>		
4	<p>Has there ever been a safety-related incident at your school or district in which it became clear after the incident that students or others had prior knowledge of that incident, but <b>did not report it?</b></p>		

/ If you answered “yes” to any of the above questions, there are likely opportunities to strengthen your school or district's approach to reporting in a way that better anticipates and responds to school safety concerns.

CISA Tabletop Exercise Packages (CTEPs) are a comprehensive set of resources designed to assist stakeholders in conducting their own exercises. Partners can use the CTEPs specifically designed for Elementary, Middle, and High Schools to discuss their organizations ability to address a variety of scenarios, including question sets on reporting and information sharing.

For more information, visit: <https://www.cisa.gov/resources-tools/services/cisa-tabletop-exercise-packages>

# WHAT REPORTING PROCESSES OR APPROACHES ARE IN PLACE AT YOUR SCHOOL OR DISTRICT?

The next step is to think about efforts, approaches, or processes in place at your school or district that facilitate reporting. Having thought through the strength of the current reporting culture at your school or district, consider how students and others actually report threats and other concerns related to school safety. Below are some questions to guide your thinking.

## REPORTING PROCESSES

- What reporting processes are in place at your district and school?
- What reporting methods/options do you offer? (e.g., phone line, email, online forms, mobile app, in-person)
- Do these reporting options vary according to grade-level or student age (e.g., what options are available for elementary students vs. middle and high school students)?
- How do your students typically report concerns?
- Who receives these reports, (i.e., what are staff roles)?
- What information do you collect from reports?
- How do staff coordinate to respond to reports?
- How do you track reports that you receive, and any follow-up actions taken in response to reports?

# TRAINING AND OUTREACH EFFORTS TO SUPPORT REPORTING

Outreach and training can help familiarize students, staff, families, and others in your reporting community with topics related to reporting. Building awareness of reporting can also help to set the tone around the importance of reporting. To start, think through your current approach to training by considering the following questions or use these questions to help guide your planning.

## QUESTIONS

- Do you currently provide training and outreach related to reporting to your school community?
  - » If no, consider questions 2 to 6 as you plan your outreach efforts, then review checklist 2.1 to identify strategies to improve awareness.
  - » If yes, answer questions 2 to 6, then review checklist 2.1 to identify potential areas for improvement.
- When does/will training occur during the school year?
- Who receives/will receive training on threat reporting?
- What messages about reporting do you/will you emphasize in training?
  - » How does this vary across different student populations (e.g., age groups, grade-levels)?
  - » How does this vary across different members of your reporting community (e.g., students, teachers, other school staff, families)?
- How do you/will you engage school staff in training and outreach efforts around reporting?
- How do you/will you engage students in training and outreach efforts around reporting?

# CHECKLIST

## Strategies to Improve Training & Outreach Around Reporting

Whether or not you have a training program in place to build awareness of reporting across your school community, these strategies can help improve knowledge of the importance of reporting and of reporting processes. Use this checklist to plan your training program to encourage bystander reporting at your school or district.

<b>TIMING AND FREQUENCY OF TRAINING</b>	<b>CHECK</b>
Train staff prior to the start of the school year	
Train students at the start of the school year	
Stagger additional short refresher trainings for students and staff to occur at multiple points in the school year	
Differentiate training length and content to meet the needs of the audience (role, grade level)	

<b>DESIGNING TRAINING</b>	<b>CHECK</b>
Tailor training materials to reference your local context	
Engage key staff involved in reporting by asking them to help facilitate trainings or presentations	
Use vignettes to illustrate importance of reporting and reporting processes	

# CHECKLIST

KEY TRAINING TOPICS	CHECK
Importance of reporting	
What behaviors, concerns, or situations to report	
How to submit a report (via each mode offered) <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>– During vs. after school hours</li><li>– What information is important to include in a report</li></ul>	
What happens after a report is submitted <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>– Conditions to maintain anonymity</li><li>– Who is involved in receiving and responding to reports</li><li>– When will follow up happen</li><li>– What information will be shared with the reporting community</li><li>– How will outcomes be communicated to the reporting community</li></ul>	
Additional topics for school staff training: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>– Where to forward various types of reports received</li><li>– Privacy protocols (including the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and health and safety exceptions)</li><li>– Protocols for responding to various types of reports (timing, roles involved, decision-trees, etc.)</li><li>– How to support and encourage students to come forward</li><li>– How to engage with students during a report and common slang expressions</li></ul>	

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